

LEGAL LEAVES



E.F. TURNER



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BEING A LAWYER'S TALES OUT
OF SCHOOL

BY

EDWARD F. TURNER

AUTHOR OF "T LEAVES," "MORE T LEAVES," "TANTLER'S SISTER,
AND OTHER UNTRUTHFUL STORIES," ETC.

LONDON

SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE

1903

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775611
1943

Printed by BALLANTYNE, HANSON & Co.
At the Ballantyne Press

P R E F A C E

WITH few exceptions the Tales and Sketches in this volume have been written in my not very abundant leisure hours during the past eighteen months. The labour, if that can be called labour which has been a purely voluntary occupation of spare time, has been very congenial to me, but whether the result of it will find favour with the gentle reader (the reader is always assumed to be gentle, though I have seen an offending book pitched out of the window) is another matter altogether. My fear is that after perusing this volume, or as much of it as he can get through, he may wish I had devoted myself to golf or skittles instead of writing it—my diffident hope that he may like it enough to wish there were more. I do not mean more for the money, but more in a large, complimentary, and even noble sense of the word.

In these tales out of school I have drawn upon imagination, general observation of life, and personal recollections. In so far as the last of these sources has been pressed into my service I hope it is needless for me to say that I have betrayed no confidence, and have written no word that can cause pain or resentment to any person referred to who is now living, or to the friends of any person who is now dead. Names, places, and incidents have been

so turned about that no cap will fit any head the owner of which could possibly try to put it on.

Just a few words about the seven short pieces that will be found railed off at the end. They were not originally written with any idea of publication, but for the purpose of being read privately before a certain learned body to which it is my privilege to belong, after full discussion of the very important legal, or, at all events, lawful, subject of dinner. I have had to alter them greatly in order to adapt them for print, and it is for the reader to judge whether they will bear the very different test to which they are now exposed.

E. F. T.

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MRS. HOOD'S FATHER

THE client who goes to see a London solicitor on business is not received by a powdered menial in marble halls leading to a tastefully decorated reception-room, even though the solicitor be blessed with a very large practice. He (I mean the client) will generally find himself first in a dingy outer office, where two or three clerks may often be seen engaged or not, as the case may be, in their several tasks, and in which two or three chairs will be encamped in a corner for clients and others to sit upon before being ushered into the solicitor's presence. Extreme luxury may in some offices find outward expression in the addition to the chairs of a table, measuring four feet by three, with a bottle of water permanently established on it, the contents of which would probably be fatal if imbibed, but as there is no glass this is immaterial; and to while away the time of waiting the *Estates Gazette* of last Thursday fortnight is occasionally provided, but that is only when there is a table. I have known instances in which the *Times* is actually taken in for the nominal benefit of clients and others coming to the office during the day, but naturally the clerks generally take possession of that if there is any sporting news of interest. There are indeed offices in which there is a waiting-room to which the visitor is conducted after going through preliminary facings, but these

instances are so few that they may be regarded as rare exceptions.

The person deputed to receive clients and other visitors varies according to circumstances, and among other circumstances has to be reckoned the fact that it is not usually his only duty, nor, if it were, would he always be at hand to perform it. He has, for instance, to get his dinner during the day, and he seems to have a curious capacity for getting it during the greater part of the day. Again, he often combines with the duties of receiving people and getting his dinner other useful offices that take him away, such as delivering letters or sending off telegrams. But still there is generally some one whose business it is primarily supposed to be to attend to people when they enter the office. Sometimes it is a Commissionaire, sometimes it is a boy, who positively seems to grow out of his sleeves as you look at him, and sometimes—very seldom—it is a very, very old man who has been in the service of the firm for generations in that humble capacity.

Such an old man it was who filled that position in the office of Messrs. Merivale, Tyndal & Vaughan, solicitors, of No. 220 Lincoln's Inn Fields. It was an old firm, with a large family business, and there had been successions of Merivales and Tyndals for more years than any living practitioner could remember even by tradition. Vaughan was indeed an interloper whose name had not figured in the firm before his own time, but it was to be said in his excuse that he was a son-in-law of the present Merivale, who had only daughters, and that Vaughan's own eldest son, now aged two, was already destined to be articled to the firm, and so bring more Merivale blood into it, at the earliest possible date.

The name of the old man was Bibbles. There were those who said that it was not Bibbles at all really, but that the name Bibulus (apparently some confusion with a heathen god) had been facetiously bestowed on him as a nick-name at some remote period by an articled clerk, on account of his having when a young man just a very slight tendency during his dinner-time in the middle of the day to consume more whiskey than was consistent with a perfectly clear comprehension of his duties remaining to be performed in the afternoon, and that it had been corrupted to Bibbles. However that may be, he was known by no other name, even by the present partners, to whom he had been Bibbles ever since any of them had known him, and it was doubted whether he knew any other himself now that he was so very old. If he did, he never mentioned it.

Bibbles was so very old indeed that it is difficult to take hold of any particular part of him for purposes of description. He had a face, for instance, but you could hardly call it a face, because every feature seemed to be puckered up into the next one. The wrinkled throat got lost in joining the wrinkled chin, the wrinkled chin merged in the wrinkled cheeks, and there was no line of demarcation between the wrinkled cheeks and the wrinkled forehead. The nose did stand out a little, but, being a very small, snubby sort of nose, not sufficiently to redeem itself so that you could really call it a feature, and the poor old bleary eyes had absolutely no expression whatever in them, except when another clerk (old too, but figuratively speaking centuries younger than Bibbles), who was addicted to snuff, passed on to him a piece of *Reynolds' Weekly News*, done up as a little bag, with some of that commodity inside. Then for a

minute Bibbles came really to life and looked positively eager.

His very suit of rusty black seemed to have congealed into one compound garment full of wrinkles like its owner, and the only item of dress that caught attention was a voluminous neck-tie, also black, which appeared to go round his neck two or three times before finishing in a sort of bow. It went round in more ways than one, for it appeared to revolve slowly, and the bow only rested as a rule for any length of time under his left ear.

The firm would have pensioned him long ago, but when the subject was mentioned he begged to be allowed to stay on. He said that he should not know what to do with himself anywhere else ; that he had neither wife nor child living ; and that to come to the old office where he had been so many years was all he cared about. So he had his way, and did or tried to do his daily work, and retained his own little corner in the outer office, including a high stool on which he had sat ever since he first entered the service, and which nothing would induce him to change for a chair with a back to it, though, when he sat on it now, the upper portion of his poor old worn-out body described nearly a semi-circle, starting with the stool and ending with his nose close to a desk in front of him. Indeed, but for the support afforded by the desk in front, he must have toppled over forwards.

The older clients of the firm, to whom he was a familiar figure, naturally got to know the old man, and nothing pleased him more than when one of them would say a few kind words to him, and when any of them called him Mr. Bibbles he sat up with a nearly straight back for quite half-an-hour.

Among those who had always taken a little notice of him was a very wealthy widow lady, whose business affairs made her a pretty frequent visitor, and all the more so because she was exceedingly fond of making wills and codicils. It was not that she was vindictive and given to "cutting out" legatees, but that she loved to change her testamentary gifts, so far as articles of a personal kind were concerned, very much in the same way as some people like to frequently change the positions of furniture in a room. She was in advanced middle age, and had several children and grandchildren, between whom she anxiously wished to make a fair and appropriate division of her furniture, jewellery, plate, and such-like articles. The really important bequests of property never troubled her, and had long since been put on a satisfactory basis; but whereas one sum of ten thousand pounds is exactly the same as another sum of ten thousand pounds, who shall say whether a silver bowl of George the Second's time given to one person is exactly balanced by a valuable china vase or an old cabinet given to another person? What a problem this presents to the anxious mind when it is desired to treat both legatees exactly alike! So Mrs. Hood made many wills and codicils, and the silver bowls and china vases and other effects were given to and taken away from particular persons, and other gifts substituted with bewildering frequency. For which and other reasons she was, as I have said, a frequent visitor.

She had become a client originally because the firm had always acted for her husband and his family. She had brought him no fortune, but had been an exceedingly good and true wife to him, insomuch that when he died he left

absolutely to her his very considerable property in the full belief that she would do what was right and just by their children. She had fully justified his confidence in every way, and the firm, with very good reason, esteemed her highly both as a client and as a good woman, and strange to say they had no objections to offer to her frequent testamentary upheavals of her goods and chattels. In fact, Mrs. Hood's wills and codicils were rather amusing and not unprofitable, and afforded excellent practice for articled clerks even in their first year.

"What does Mrs. Hood want—another new will I suppose. It's about her usual time for doing family post with her present legacies," remarked Mr. Merivale one morning, as he opened a letter in her well-known handwriting. The letter only asked him for an appointment, as she rather particularly wished to see him, and in a postscript she added, "It's partly about a new will or codicil, but not what you will suppose."

"I wonder what she means," commented Mr. Merivale; "it may be some feminine fancy, but at all events it will be nothing to do any harm to a living creature I am very sure."

The appointment was given and Mrs. Hood came. She paused to say a few kind words to Bibbles, according to her custom and to his great pride, on her way into Mr. Merivale's room, and having exchanged greetings with him, proceeded to business.

"I came to have a talk with you, Mr. Merivale, about a subject that has very often been on my mind, but which I have never felt at liberty to speak about, even to you as my legal adviser, until now, still less to take any other steps;

nor indeed have I until quite recently had any real prospect of doing so to any purpose. I believe you know that I was the adopted child of Mr. and Mrs. Oliver."

Mr. Merivale bowed assent to the possession of that knowledge.

"But I think you know nothing more?"

"That is so, Mrs. Hood."

"I thought so, because my dear husband, though he deeply appreciated the affection and kindness always shown to me by the couple who adopted me and whose name I bore till I was married, always regarded it as a subject best kept to ourselves. He was also, I think, a little afraid that it might lead quite unnecessarily and unwisely into going still further into past history and disclosing the fact," (she coloured slightly here, but went on quite steadily), "that my parents were in a very humble class of life. He had no feeling of pride about it on his own account; but in his true loyalty to me he was afraid that I might be injured socially by its becoming known, though indeed, as I always told him, the world was large enough for me while it contained him and my children. I think perhaps he also considered it best for the sake of our children, at all events until they grew up and could reflect for themselves, that nothing should be known beyond the bare fact that I was the adopted child of the dear good people who regarded me and were always treated by me as parents to the end of their lives. They were not at all rich, but they were refined and highly educated people, and gave me every advantage in their power. My father may have been a cabman for anything I know to the contrary, Mr. Merivale, but it was not the fault of my dear parents by adoption if

any trace of that distinguished origin is observable in me." There might have been just a little embarrassment in the laugh with which Mrs. Hood said this, but if so it instantly passed away.

"I gathered at different times that my parents were in a poor class of life, that my mother died when I was still an infant, and that I was barely a year old when adopted, and that my adoption was the result of an advertisement put into the papers by the Olivers, and was so arranged that even their name was not revealed to my father, though every possible information was given to satisfy him that I should be well cared for. I was also told that it was a vital part of the bargain on their side that neither my father, nor any other person connected with me, should ever see me or hear of me or attempt to inquire about me. Such crumbs of information I gained, but beyond that nothing; and indeed I did not know that I was not actually a daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Oliver until I was far advanced in my teens. They told me then, as a matter of conscience, that I had been adopted by them, and also told me what I have just repeated; but they begged me to ask nothing more, and I could see that it would pain them if I did so. They felt, I think, as I believe childless people do sometimes in such a case as mine, a sort of sense of personal injury that it was all make-believe, and that I was not really their very own child, and they liked to put the hard fact out of sight as much as possible. I acquiesced in their wishes, as I would have submitted to any sacrifice for their sake; but as time went on, and especially after I had left their home on my marriage, my conscience was uneasy as to whether I was acting rightly in making no

attempt to find my father, and, if he were alive and in poverty, to help him. My husband could not sympathise with me in this, generous as his heart was. He would point out that it was not I who had deserted my father, but my father who had deserted me, or at all events severed all connection with my existence, whether his motives were good or bad. He also hinted that while he had the utmost respect and affection for my adopted parents, the resurrection of a real father, who might be anything unpleasant to contemplate socially and was morally certain not to be moving in an exalted sphere of life, would be an embarrassing addition to the family. This he would say kindly, as he said everything kindly to me, and in a bantering way; but I could plainly see that he meant to convey that it would not be fair to him and to our children to attempt to trace my father's existence, and I felt bound to respect that most natural feeling. Moreover, any step on my part in that direction would have been even then, as I felt sure, regarded as ungrateful and unkind by the Olivers. My hands were therefore doubly tied.

“And now I am coming to the point, Mr. Merivale. My dear husband is gone, my children are out in the world. Mr. Oliver died some years ago, and his old wife not many months since. My father, if alive, which is not at all likely, must be a very old man, and if he is alive no one can be hurt now, socially or otherwise, by my tracing him, if possible, and doing whatever is in my power to make his last days easy for him. And that is what I have come about to-day, Mr. Merivale, though, by the way, as I am here I may as well mention that I should like to leave

my diamond pendant to my eldest son's little girl, Muriel, instead of to his wife as at present, and to give his wife instead my diamond feather brooch which is now left to the same little girl."

"Do you think you are wise, Mrs. Hood, to stir up these old ashes? I don't mean the pendant or the brooch, but your venerable father? You will forgive my freedom in raising the doubt, I am sure?"

"Yes, Mr. Merivale, I do think it wise—or at all events I think it right, which to my mind comes to the same thing. I am not acting hastily I assure you."

"It will be a difficult matter to set inquiries on foot."

"I quite realise that. But stay, I have stupidly forgotten to tell you one very important thing. I never knew my father's name till quite lately when I was looking through some old papers of dear old Mrs. Oliver, whose executrix I was as you know, and who specially asked that no one but myself should touch them. With one exception they were of no importance, otherwise than as a matter of sentiment—a lock of my hair cut off when I was a little child and treasured ever since by the dear good soul, and other such echoes of the past. But the exception was nothing less than my own baptismal certificate. It had been handed over with me no doubt as a sort of direction in the parcel, which was myself, and had been carefully laid by, and here it is. The names are odd, aren't they, and so exceptional that I hope they will help you?"

They were certainly odd. Her father was described in the document as Augustus Wellington Burton, by occupation a clerk, and her mother's Christian names were

Juliana Maria, and Mrs. Hood's own selected Christian names were the same as her mother's but reversed, Maria Juliana. These names had been entirely cast aside by Mr. and Mrs. Oliver, and she had been brought up as Edith, which was Mrs. Oliver's own Christian name.

"Yes," said Mr. Merivale, "these names are sufficiently unusual to give us something to go upon, but, of course, they don't carry us far. This inquiry means money, Mrs. Hood, and money that may be spent to no purpose, or only to establish the fact that your father died many years ago—you realise that?"

"Fully."

"And you are quite decided about it?"

"I am."

"Then, of course, it only remains for me to place my best services at your disposal, as always."

As a first step Mr. Merivale suggested that a cautious advertisement should be published disclosing enough to attract the notice of the right person, or any one who might know him, and not enough to bring an answer from every indigent old man that might come to see it. Mr. Merivale said he would think this over carefully, and also the selection of the newspapers in which it might be most judiciously inserted, and he asked for two or three days' time to reflect on these matters and any other suggestions that might occur to him at the present stage. Mrs. Hood assented readily, and said she had every confidence that Mr. Merivale would act for the best. And then, just as she was about to leave, she paused and hesitated in a way that showed she had something still to say. Mr. Merivale divined this and looked at her interrogatively.

"I know you think me rather foolish about wills and codicils, Mr. Merivale."

"Not foolish from our point of view, Mrs. Hood. So far as we are concerned the more the merrier, if I may use that word in connection with such a solemn thing as a testamentary document. What I have sometimes ventured to think and say is, that perhaps you give yourself needless trouble and put yourself to needless expense in your desire to do what is just about, comparatively speaking, small matters."

"Yes, I know, but I suppose it is an incurable weakness. What I just wanted to say was, that as life is uncertain and this inquiry may take some time—and I am sure my children will not let it drop if I begin it and tell them how much I feel about it—I should like you just to put into that new codicil about the pendant and the brooch an annuity of £200 to my father, if he is alive and his identity established either in my life-time or within five years after my death. I have thought of this too, and it would make me feel still more easy in mind."

"You know, Mrs. Hood, that the codicil would become public property after your death, and that it will be necessary to make it rather explanatory owing to your being known only as Mr. and Mrs. Oliver's daughter?"

"Yes, I have thought of all that also, and I really wish it, and should like to sign it as soon as possible. If you will just let me know when it is ready I will come whenever you appoint. You can just show me the form of advertisement you decide on at the same time. I fear I have taken up a great deal of your valuable time, Mr. Merivale, but the matter has been much on my mind, and I am so relieved

to have told you all about it. Good-bye and many thanks."

Mr. Merivale opened his door and called "Bubbles, please show Mrs. Hood into her carriage." This was a special privilege of the old man, and he shuffled off in front of Mrs. Hood almost with alacrity, certainly with as near an approach to it as his aged limbs would allow. She spoke kindly to him as before, and as she drove off waved a hand to him to his great pride and pleasure.

Mr. Merivale ruminated over the form of advertisement at odd moments, and in the meantime immediately prepared the codicil with his own hand, as he wished to express it as judiciously as possible. It was copied that night, and on the following morning he called in one of his articled clerks and gave him the rough copy and fair copy to examine against each other, telling him at the same time something of the circumstances as a matter of office interest. He added :—

"I am going to write to Mrs. Hood this afternoon giving her an appointment to call and sign it to-morrow afternoon, so it will do if you examine it any time to-day. Please be very careful about it, and particularly the names."

The articled clerk was very busy during the morning with other matters, but in the afternoon he sallied into the outer office and secured the help of a clerk to read the fair copy to him while he checked it with the draft. "Please read very slowly," he said, with an air of some mystery and importance, "it's very particular, Mr. Merivale says, and you had better spell the names to me."

There being no stranger in the outer office, and the document being short, the articled clerk sat down at one of the desks and the other clerk (it was the elderly clerk

who periodically bestowed snuff on Bibbles) began to read in a droning voice acquired in a solicitor's office by long practice, and reaching its highest merit only when it becomes possible to read in such a way as not to convey the faintest intelligent meaning to any one word in its relation to any other.

After the usual preliminary beginning, and a few sentences carrying out Mrs. Hood's wishes as to the pendant and the brooch, the important part came, and the articled clerk braced himself to follow the somnolent reading very carefully, and again reminded the other clerk to spell out the names.

“And whereas I have always been known as the reputed child of the late J-O-H-N F-R-E-E-M-A-N O-L-I-V-E-R and E-D-I-T-H his wife.

“And whereas I have ascertained from a certificate of my baptism which has recently come into my possession that my father's name was A-U-G-U-S-T-U-S W-E-L-L-I-N-G-T-O-N B-U-R-T-O-N—why, what on earth's the matter, Bibbles ?”

The question was pertinent, for Bibbles, who had been sitting at his desk stamping letters, had suddenly started up, and with his eyes wide open, and every appearance of agitation on his face, now stood facing the clerk who was reading aloud.

“What was the name you were reading ?” he asked, in a quavering, tremulous voice.

“Augustus Wellington Burton, and a rum name it is too. What do you want to know for ?”

But the articled clerk was beginning to feel that it was not consistent with his dignity for this conversation to be

carried on in the middle of examining a codicil that had been specially committed to his charge by Mr. Merivale. Moreover, he regarded Bibbles, not without some reason, in the light or rather the darkness of a senile fossil. So he interfered with the remark, "Never mind, let's get on. If Bibbles is curious about odd names you can show him the draft afterwards."

So the examination of the codicil, whereby an annuity of £200 was in the specified circumstances left to Augustus Wellington Burton, was concluded, and the articled clerk took it away. As he did so he threw the draft on to Bibbles' desk, to which the old man had humbly retired, and said to him good-naturedly, but not I fear reverentially, "There, old chap, now you can study the names to your heart's content. Let me have it when you have had your fill of them."

Bibbles, whose thoughts, if he had any, seemed a long way off, roused himself, and took the draft into his withered old hands. He did not need to put on his spectacles, for he always wore them, and was popularly believed never to take them off.

He read the document very slowly, and did not appear to take in its purport at first, but as he got at last towards the end its meaning seemed gradually to dawn upon him. And then he put it down and sat perfectly still, leaning heavily on the desk and with his face buried in his hands.

The clerk, given to snuff, who had been watching him and muttering to himself "Poor old chap, I do believe he's going dotty," went up to him, and putting his hand on his shoulder shook him gently, "Now then Bibbles, old man, what are you wool-gathering about over that codicil ?

Have a pinch of snuff, and don't you worry yourself about the blessed names. Your name is Bibbles, and that's a very queer name too if you come to names."

Bubbles turned towards him and took the proffered pinch, for which he thanked him kindly, and then he took up the draft codicil, as his fellow clerk supposed, to return it to the articled clerk. But he did not do that. He shuffled along a passage until he reached a door that had Mr. Merivale's name on it, and after pausing outside for a few moments, as if he were undecided whether to go in or not, he entered.

Mr. Merivale looked up, expecting the name of a caller to be announced, but Bubbles stood there with the draft codicil in his hand, looking as if he were trying to find words, as indeed he was.

"Well, Bubbles, who is it?" asked Mr. Merivale.

"If you please, sir, it isn't exactly any one, but might I take the liberty of saying a word?"

Mr. Merivale was evidently surprised, as Bubbles was not at all a communicative person, but looking at the old man again he saw that he was trembling all over, and the paper in his hand shaking as if stirred by the wind. He at once got up and put a chair behind the old man, in spite of feeble remonstrances on the part of Bubbles, and almost forced him into it. Bubbles resisted, because to sit down in the presence of Mr. Merivale was to him very like an act of sacrilege.

"I am afraid you're not quite the thing to-day, Bubbles. Tell me what's the matter?"

But that was not an easy thing for Bubbles to do, and it was only his traditional feeling of respect, and his extreme

desire to get off the chair on which he was impiously sitting, that enabled him, after another pause, to begin: "I was in the outer office just now, sir, when this draft was being examined," he commenced at last, handing the paper at the same time to Mr. Merivale.

Mr. Merivale glanced at it and said, a little impatiently, for he was busy, and it seemed unto him that Bibbles had developed suddenly a more advanced state of dotage, "Yes, I see Mrs. Hood's codicil—what of it?"

"If you please, sir, I hope the firm won't think it a liberty, and I would not think of mentioning it in the office or saying a word to anybody but yourself, but I've thought it right and respectful to come and tell you that I'm Augustus Wellington Burton, and my wife's names were Juliana Maria, and our little girl was called Maria Juliana, and when she was quite a baby she was adopted by a lady and gentleman, as her mother was gone, and I didn't know what better to do for her, as I was away all day and couldn't bring her to the office. She was the only one, and such a pretty little thing that it was very hard to part with her, but I did it for the best. Of course, sir, I'll keep it to myself, and the firm may trust me. I've been a long time in its service, and I'm not going to disgrace the firm, sir, now by being inconvenient."

During this speech, which was by far the longest Bibbles had ever been known to make, Mr. Merivale underwent acute stages of utter incredulity and intense surprise. His first impression when Bibbles finished was that the old man had really gone off his head, and especially as Bibbles rose from his chair and made for quietly leaving the room, as if everything necessary had been said. But something

in Bibbles's manner seemed to Mr. Merivale's instinct to exclude that theory. Calling him back he questioned him kindly but closely, and took down from him notes of all the material facts and means of verification, and he arrived at the conclusion that, subject to certain inquiries, of the result of which he had little doubt, the firm's old office messenger Bibbles was none other than Mrs. Hood's father. It was not a pleasant or desirable solution, as between the firm and their esteemed and wealthy client, that they should thus provide her with a father from their own staff, but it could not be helped.

Having obtained all the information he desired, Mr. Merivale said :—

“Now, Bibbles, I won't keep you any longer. Mrs. Hood is coming here to-morrow afternoon, and in the meantime I shall verify a few facts if possible, so as to be able to tell her everything. She comes at half-past two, and I think you go to your dinner at two. Come back at three, and then wait till I call you in—that is, if Mrs. Hood wishes to see you, as I feel sure she will—as it will give me time to talk matters over with her. I have no right to impose silence on you about a matter that so deeply concerns yourself, but I am glad, very glad, Bibbles, that you have not talked of this to anybody, and I ask you not to do so at all events till after Mrs. Hood's wishes are known. She is a highly respected client of the firm, and I know you will do nothing that could distress or annoy her.”

“I hope I know my duty to the firm after these many years, sir, and you may be sure of me,” answered Bibbles quite proudly, and for the moment standing almost erect as he turned to go.

He reached the door, and had half turned the handle when he paused and looked round again at Mr. Merivale, and said very anxiously and wistfully and with an air of having done something deserving of censure, "If you please, sir, my just mentioning this won't make any difference to your letting me stay with the firm, will it? I could not bear to leave the office I've been in all these many, many years."

It was a touching question. It was also embarrassing, because it might reasonably be presumed that Mrs. Hood would scarcely leave her own father to remain as office messenger to her own solicitors, and, in fact, the future of Bibbles, however brief in the course of nature, had already struck Mr. Merivale as presenting a problem of some difficulty. But he felt that a soothing answer of a non-committed kind would meet the poor old man's case for the moment, and he replied cheerily:—

"All right, Bibbles. Don't be afraid, you may be quite sure the firm will never do anything to hurt such an old and faithful servant. Set your mind at ease about that."

"Thank you, sir," said Bibbles simply, and he slowly shuffled out.

Nothing was observable about Bibbles for the rest of the day, or at all events nothing to attract the not very attentive notice of the clerks, and the next morning saw him at his usual post and at his usual hour. But as the time drew near to the afternoon of that day any one who watched the old man closely might have detected a certain nervous restlessness in his manner and movements, and a tendency to lose himself as it were, so that he had now and then to be spoken to twice before he could collect himself and

attend to what was said. It may well be that in spite of his dull and decaying faculties he felt a good deal more than he showed even thus, and that his anxious desire to keep faith with Mr. Merivale and disclose nothing to anybody led him to put great restraint on himself.

His dinner-hour came, and he repaired as usual to a modest old eating-house in a back street, not far from the office, where "Mr. Bibbles' seat" in a certain corner was always kept for him, and was nearly as sacred to him as his old office stool, and nearly as uncomfortable. He had seen through several successive landlords, and the only joke he was ever known to have consciously perpetrated was, that when a change of management took place he always seized the opportunity to remark to the new-comer that he had been bought as part of the good-will, which was literally true, though he was probably not the subject of a separate item in the valuation.

He was a little, spare man, and at no time a hearty trencherman, and to-day he was not even up to his usual degree of appetite, insomuch that a waiter who also went with the stock-in-trade, and would have looked old if Bibbles had not looked so much older, remarked on it.

"You don't seem to enjoy your dinner to-day, Mr. Bibbles. The two on mashed" (signifying elliptically two sausages on mashed potatoes), "are done as you like 'em I 'ope."

Bibbles shook himself together, feeling perhaps that even there it behoved him to act as if nothing unusual had happened or ever would happen to him, and declared that they were done to a turn, and he was enjoying them famously. But he wasn't all the same, and his dinner was a poor pretence.

"Mr. Bibbles is breaking up, I'm afraid," said the old waiter afterwards to the barmaid, with a touch of genuine regret in his voice. "'E didn't eat 'is dinner to-day worth speaking of, and seemed absent-minded like." The old waiter shook his head, and, having given up as much time to sentiment as he could afford, hurried to a sort of shaft which communicated with the upper regions, and bawled out, "One biled beef carrots and pertaters two giblet pies and one steak pudding with chips' urry up with that chump as the gent says 'e can't wait till doomsday."

Meanwhile, Mr. Merivale had vigorously followed up the necessary inquiries, and as the proofs were few and easily obtained, he had practically verified Bibbles' story by the time Mrs. Hood came to keep her appointment. He would have been more than human if he had not wrapped a little mystery round the disclosure he had to make.

"Well, Mr. Merivale, you see I am here exactly to time. By-the-bye, I did not see your old messenger Bibbles as I came in. Nothing is amiss with the old man, I hope. He has been quite an institution here ever since I can remember."

"He is all right, thank you, Mrs. Hood. It happens to be his dinner-time."

"That's well. Now, shall I just look through the codicil before I sign it?"

Mr. Merivale handed it to her, and as she read it a rather dissatisfied look appeared in her face.

"Mr. Merivale, I am sure you will excuse me, but I see you have simply left an annuity of £200 to my father, Augustus Wellington Burton, without saying more. Doesn't that look as if every one knew who he was, whereas

nobody does? I thought you said it would have to be explanatory."

"So I did, Mrs. Hood, and I prepared it in that way at first, but afterwards I saw reason to come to the conclusion that a simple gift to him by name would be sufficient." Mr. Merivale could not bring himself to let the cat out of the bag yet. It was such a large cat.

Mrs. Hood did not look convinced, but she had great faith in Mr. Merivale, and submitted. So a clerk was summoned, and the codicil duly signed and witnessed.

"And now, Mr. Merivale, I should like so much to know how you propose to word the advertisement. Have you had time to prepare it?"

"Well, yes—no—the fact is, Mrs. Hood, that I hardly think it will be necessary to advertise."

"Not necessary! And why not? I thought you considered it indispensable as a first step."

"So I did, Mrs. Hood, but a very extraordinary circumstance has changed my opinion."

"What circumstance? Do please explain, Mr. Merivale, for I am getting bewildered, and if I did not know you to be above it I should say you were playing with a subject that I feel very keenly about."

Mr. Merivale saw that he had kept the cat inside as long as was either considerate or judicious, so he released the animal without more ado.

"I will explain, Mrs. Hood. Try not to be very much startled if I tell you that your father has turned up since you were here on Tuesday."

She was very much startled, so startled that she turned quite pale.

"Where and how?" she asked, with painful eagerness.

"Here—in this office. Your father is simply Bibbles."

Mrs. Hood got up from her chair and starting backwards looked at Mr. Merivale for a moment as if he were a dangerous lunatic. He felt that the sooner it was over now the better, and, begging her to calm herself, told her the exact story and the proofs he had obtained.

A long conversation followed. Mrs. Hood, in the warmth of her good heart was at first for taking Bibbles off bodily in her carriage home, and doing all sorts of things for his comfort and happiness, but Mr. Merivale gradually led her to see that it was a case to be dealt with very quietly. He pointed out how Bibbles had grown old in his present occupation, which had become part and parcel of his innermost being; the vain attempts made to pension him; his painful anxiety even yesterday that he should still retain his old place in the office. He admitted that it would not be fitting for him to really remain an office messenger now, but he begged her, for the sake of the old man himself, to go very gently to work with any change, however much intended for his benefit. Mrs. Hood was a sensible woman, and saw the wisdom of the advice and promised to follow it.

"But, Mr. Merivale, you don't see any harm in my seeing him here for a few minutes now. You say he knows that he is my father and that you will have told me."

"No harm, of course, Mrs. Hood; I fully expected you to express such a wish, and will call him in, and then you shall have my room all to yourselves for a little talk while I go out and keep an appointment near here."

She thanked him for his delicate consideration and good advice as he moved to the door.

He went to the outer office, and, putting his head inside, said, "Mr. Bibbles, will you come into my room, please?"

The "Mr." was an unconscious tribute to the change that had come, but it was such an extremely novel prefix that the clerks there lifted their heads to make sure that they had heard aright.

Bibbles was sitting on his old office stool and leaning heavily on the desk in front, more bent than usual perhaps; in fact, his head seemed to be almost touching the desk. He did not move, so Mr. Merivale said it again:—

"Mr. Bibbles, will you come into my room, please?"

No answer again. Mr. Merivale went up to him and put his hand on the old man's shoulder, but still there was no answer.

Say it again, Mr. Merivale. Shout it. Put a trumpet to the deaf ear and call through that. And still there shall be no answer.

The shock, the vague and uneasy sense of a great change coming into a life that was grown to be little more than a piece of mechanism; the effort to understand and then to subdue all the half-formed struggling emotions that sought to rise to the surface; the awakened memory of the little child that he had parted with for her good such a long, long time ago; the discovery that she was rich, happy, and an honoured client of the firm to which he was attached with a fidelity that was rooted in his very soul; the weight of all this had been too much for the attenuated thread to which his life was hanging. Without a pang, a groan, a struggle, without even the knowledge

of those about him, it had come to pass that Bibbles had posted his last letter and delivered his last message for the firm he had served so humbly but so faithfully, and now his spirit was carrying for him, to a land that was very far off, a message to which the answer would not be received until the day of Judgment.

So Mrs. Hood found her father—and lost him.

AN IDYLL OF GRAY'S INN

NOT long ago I had occasion to make my way through Gray's Inn, and to emerge from it by way of Field Court in the direction of Bedford Row. I rubbed my eyes and looked in vain for a corner house once very familiar to me as No. 2 Field Court, but it had vanished into air, and the fact that it had ever existed was recorded only for me in a tablet of my memory. Upon the top-floor of that same corner house used to dwell in my early days a managing clerk in the office in which I was articled, and himself a young admitted solicitor, on whom for present purposes I bestow the name of Johnston. He was a very kind friend to me from the first day that I knew him, and I went often to his top-floor Chambers, where he always gave me of his best, including his best advice, to which I hope I listened and by some of which at all events I hope I profited.

But I am free to confess that Johnston was not the principal attraction that drew me to his Chambers. He had a very beautiful young wife, whom he had married so imprudently and when they were both so ridiculously young, that if bankruptcy had ensued, the person who corresponded in those days to the Official Receiver, if there was any personage then who in any way filled the post now occupied by that combination of a legal cork-

screw and an equitable gimlet, would have had positive buttered toast in the way of telling questions as to the causes of insolvency.

Let me hasten to assure the reader however that my feelings towards Johnston's wife were of the most intensely proper if sentimental kind. To me she was a sort of fairy in that dingy place, where she seemed to make all things bright and beautiful. When she moved about the Inn the porters in their dingy liveries touched their hats, and seemed for a moment all the better for a sight of her. The law clerks who flitted about looked at her with furtive glances of admiration, as well they might ; but not one of them ever stared or spoke rudely when they met her pure and fearless face as she walked by them, generally with a little basket on her arm, prepared to lay out her slender allowance for "house" to the best advantage, and to rout ignominiously any tradesman who was disposed in the language of the psalmist to be deceitful upon the weights. On such occasions she assumed a preposterous but delightful demeanour of having very important business to transact, and hard indeed would have been the heart of any shopkeeper who could have taken an unfair advantage of that bright brave girl. She soon became quite an object of pride I could see to those who lived or had their business about the Inn ; and if, as she moved about alone but with perfect trustfulness, among many men of many sorts and conditions, any one had dared to insult her, I do not think she would have needed a champion for more than a few seconds, and I do think that the villain of the piece would have come off as badly as he ever did at the Surrey Theatre in the last Act, which is saying a good deal. And this mind you, notwithstanding

the fact that Gray's Inn, by reason of the many bachelors residing in its high places and the nature of its surroundings, was not a particularly fitting place in those days for a young and very beautiful woman to live in whose husband was away all day, whatever may be the case now. I say this with due reverence to the benchers, beadle, and all other constituted authorities of the distant period to which I refer, whether dead or alive.

Often and often I have realised in later years, that I used selfishly to linger on my way home at Johnston's Chambers until his gracious wife could not choose but ask me to stay for a pot-luck dinner. Often and often I have thought with shame that the pot-luck dinner was only enough for two, and was really made to appear sufficient for three by little unselfish devices, whereby she pretended to eat a great deal when in fact it was all make-believe on her part, and she was really covering the retreat of a slender larder by strategy beyond praise, and ensuring that her own husband (not very observant in such matters, though much attached to her) should not suffer from my want of consideration. I erred in ignorance, and would not consciously have caused her self-denial for the world ; but oh ! the abominable selfishness of youth, and for that matter, oh ! the equally abominable selfishness of age. If I were asked to comprehend in one word the quintessence of all virtues rolled into one—an examination question that is not the least likely to be ever put to me, in this world at all events—I would say unselfishness, and maintain the answer against all comers.

It was pot-luck, too, I can tell you. There was an establishment in the neighbourhood at which slices of cold

boiled beef, ready cooked, were to be obtained on moderate terms. The beef in question was very red, and at times had a strong taste of saltpetre ; but it came in useful when Johnston's only servant had a periodical toothache and could not prepare the modest meal, or when any other domestic catastrophe got in the way of dinner ; and in those days I thought it most palatable, especially when assisted by the greenest of green pickles, and potatoes mashed by Johnston's wife herself. She had a great talent for mashing potatoes, and used to descend after the operation with a most important and responsible expression of countenance, and a colour in her cheeks that was like unto the blush rose, but always delightful to behold.

The attentive reader will have noticed that I have just used the word "descend," and I did so advisedly, because Johnston's rooms, six in number, were not all on one floor. Three of them, including a microscopical kitchen, were attics approached from inside the set of chambers by a very small personal and private staircase, containing many traps for the unwary, but lending a dignity to the tenancy as a whole that was much appreciated by Johnston and his wife. They were also very proud of a sort of platform or niche in one corner of their sitting-room, which for some inscrutable reason was raised by the height of a single step above the rest of the room. It contained their one bookcase, and not having very observant eyes I generally fell up the step and appeared before the bookcase in the position of a prostrate suppliant when I went to get a book.

I have been keeping up my sleeves to this point the Johnston babies—one baby per sleeve—but their introduc-

tion must be no longer delayed. One was born before they went to Gray's Inn, but the other was born there, and was therefore a real genuine Gray's Inn baby. I will not pretend to say that I was personally fond of them, because, although they never did me any harm, a love of infants was not in me, nor have I ever acquired the taste, but I used to marvel at the way in which Johnston's wife, if I may use the expression, ran those babies. They never seemed to be in the way when I was there, or to make any noise, or to be suffered to become a trial to Johnston, and yet her only lieutenant in the baby department was a maid who did not even sleep on the premises, whose age cannot have much exceeded thirteen, and of whom nothing but two little legs could be seen when the elder infant was launched upon her, and placed, as the legal phrase has it, in her "possession, custody or power." How it was done without drugs I shall never know, and subsequent squalling domestic experiences in my own establishment have only served to make me marvel the more.

I remember calling at the Chambers one Saturday afternoon. Johnston and his wife were out but expected back shortly, so I got hold of a book and settled down to wait for them. The sitting-room was perfectly quiet except for a curious little gurgling sound that arrested my attention, not at all unpleasantly, after a time, until at length I began to look round for the cause. I then realised that the senior Johnston baby was lying in a cradle, wide awake but perfectly philosophical and satisfied with the business end of a feeding-bottle inserted in his mouth. I believe I said "Hullo, old chap," which was as far as I ever could get in the way of communion with an infant, but he did not take

the slightest notice of the impertinence, and without another remark on either side I relapsed into my book and he into the enjoyment of his bottle until the return of his parents. That was indeed a baby without guile, and oh ! my sons, now big enough to thrash me if so disposed, and preferring, not without reason I admit, another kind of liquid in the bottle to that which satisfied Master Johnston then, how different was your behaviour to me ; and what a lot of strong language, uttered by me to the tune of your squealings in the night season, lies at your door quite as much as it does at mine, if not, as I humbly think, more so.

From the upper windows of No. 2 Field Court there was a side-way view of two scenes, each having a romantic association attached to it. To the left was, and is, a large and imposing iron gate, never to the best of my belief opened then or now, which if it had been opened would have led to a broad gravel walk right through the old Gray's Inn garden, and over which, from the elevation of No. 2 Field Court, the walk and the garden could be seen. In real life the two Johnston babes were carted daily into the garden for country air, being generally pushed in their perambulator by the small maid before referred to, whose head came only a little way over the top of that conveyance (I am not alluding to a deed), and entrance being effected at a side gate. Do not imagine that Johnston had any vested right as an occupant of chambers to use that garden for the benefit of his offspring. What happened was that an open sesame could only be obtained from a Bencher, and that Johnston's wife penetrated through the outer door of the Chambers of a very old Bencher who lived in the Inn himself, obtained an audience, and conquering the old gentle-

man as she conquered everybody, came forth with an order for the gardens and a blessing from the old gentleman—I don't mean THE old gentleman—though I should not be prepared to say what might have been the result of an interview between him and Johnston's wife if she had called on him to ask a favour—but the very mild and benevolent old Bencher to whom she had preferred her request.

But that was not the romantic side to which I am now coming, because you cannot call two babies in a perambulator romantic, however hard you try. The romantic side was that Johnston and his wife and I used to sit on summer evenings at the window and look out at the old gate, and imagine it opened wide to admit gallant knights and high-born ladies, who, in our imagination, walked about arm in arm on the broad gravel path, and occasionally diverged on to the grass. We even pictured an occasional duel as taking place in the early morning up in one corner, and Johnston's wife quite shuddered as I drew a lurid picture of the fatal stain appearing on the white shirt of one combatant, and his being carried off the field as I put it; and then I would try to comfort her by a reminder that there was a hospital quite close by in the Gray's Inn Road. That, of course, was a shocking perversion of fact as applied to the period in question, but not more so perhaps than the rest of our make-believe, for I do not imagine that the garden of Gray's Inn was ever largely frequented by gallant knights and high-born ladies, or, at all events, that the gate and the gravel path upon which we looked out were in evidence at that period of history. But I do believe that the old gate and the old garden helped at times to carry

Johnston and his wife away from the cares and anxieties of daily life on those dreamy evenings, and enabled him to forget the quarter's rent so nearly due and so insufficiently saved up for, and his brave young wife to put aside for a brief space the cutting and contriving of garments, the desire to make a sovereign go as far as a guinea, the constant effort to hide from her husband a thousand and one petty worries that she knew instinctively would keep him awake at night and unfit him for his day's hard work. And here I interject the remark that there are wives who seem to take a positive joy in reserving every domestic annoyance, small or great, until the exact moment when a wearied husband turns the key in the front door on his return at night, and who open the flood-gates upon him before he has even had time to read the three-lined whip in the way of application for his parochial rates, which has been thrown down the area during the day with that delicacy which distinguishes the rate collector. She will pour upon him a stream in which float drunken cooks, burst water-pipes, nasty things said or written by dear friends, articles not left at the door because there was no money to pay for them on delivery, a suspicion that one of the children has chicken-pox, smash of the only china vase into fragments, total absence of starch in the things (including husband's shirts) that have come home from the wash, Smith's shameful breach of his promise to send back without fail to-day some article in constant use which he has not been mending for three weeks. These are merely random illustrations of the sort of wife I mean, and are put in to emphasise my statement that Johnston's wife was NOT of that sort, and richly earned the right to people with fancy figures that old

garden, and to describe to us (Johnston and me to wit) what she was sure they would have worn, and what she should certainly have worn herself in like circumstances, and what sort of a kind of a knight she should have expected to conduct her through the gate, holding her finger-tips, and bowing solemnly on every possible opportunity.

I referred to another kind of romantic view from Johnston's windows, looking out the other way. I meant Fulwood's Rents, much altered in these latter times by the builder, but then a very dirty, narrow, slummy *cul de sac*, commencing in Holborn and terminating with another massive gate of a different kind, which if opened would have admitted the populace into Field Court. And a very undesirable populace it was—so much so that a thieves' kitchen (whatever that means) was generally supposed to flourish there, and the language that floated over the big gate in the direction of Field Court on Saturday evenings was such that it was very necessary to close the window if Johnston's wife was about. The romance on that side only came in on account of a mysterious criminal flavour of a Jack Sheppard and Jonathan Wild description that we associated with Fulwood's Rents, and an impression, no doubt ludicrously mistaken, that it was unsafe to life to walk up into the same from Holborn without a large posse of police in attendance. This caused us to try and look out of Johnston's windows over the gate and into the Rents, with much curiosity, but we could only take in a very small triangular bit, and within those narrow limits I don't remember seeing anything more suggestive of crime than a costermonger's barrow. Still, even at this distance

of time, I vouch for the lurid nature of the language on Saturday evenings, and I trust that it has much improved since, for indeed there was ample room in that direction.

I think that, on the whole, Johnston and his wife were happy in their Gray's Inn chambers. There was a sense of independence about that set of attics (for such in truth they were) which came near to that of having a house of their own ; and the old inn was very quiet and restful in its way, and the closing of the gates at night gave a sense of dignity to their surroundings, and made it seem to them like living in some place of refuge separated from the outer world. But they were very poor—I did not appreciate how poor then, but I did afterwards, when I went forth myself and faced the world on resources as slender as theirs—and I can remember now what scheming and contriving and consultation preceded some daring enterprise of theirs, such as dining at a chop-house and going to the pit of the theatre afterwards. It fretted Johnston that his wife could not in the days of her youth and beauty have pretty dresses, and ride in coaches, and possess all that her heart could desire ; and that, when her cheeks paled with a long course of Gray's Inn air, he often could not afford to give her the change she needed ; and that Easter and Whitsuntide would pass without any chance of packing up for a little country jaunt because of the *res angusta domi*. I say it fretted him, but I am sure it never fretted her ; for her thoughts were always for others, and she never repined nor complained, and never wished for the moon except in a pretty cheerful way that had no bitterness in it, as when she described the dresses of the fine ladies that her fancy pictured going into the garden by the big iron gate in olden days, and wished she

could have witnessed the proceedings and even taken part in them, and have worn the finest dress of all, and have had her hair dressed in such an astonishingly majestic way as never was seen before or afterwards. I did not attempt to analyse then the indefinable brightness that her presence meant in that little home high up the staircase of No. 2 Field Court ; I simply enjoyed it, and was drawn by it, and admired it. And Johnston too, I don't think I do him an injustice when I say that, fond as he was of his wife, he also did not perhaps realise the full richness of her most unselfish nature, the many little worries that she warded off him, and her constant unremitting efforts to make his path smooth for him and his home happy. He knew and felt the happiness, but he did not trace then as I know he has done in later life the source from which it came.

I look back over a long expanse of years to the days when I was a constant visitor to that top-storey in Gray's Inn. I have watched Johnston and his wife, metaphorically speaking, go up and, literally, go down in the world. The chambers were succeeded by a very small house, the very small house by a rather larger house, and the rather larger house by a most eligible residence. I have seen the Gray's Inn babies become grown-up men and go out into the world and take wives unto themselves in their turn. I have seen Johnston's hair get thin on the top and his eyes need spectacles. I have seen his lady's face lose the roundness of youth, though never the sweetness of expression that will make it beautiful always. The days of *res angusta domi* are no more for them, and there is no reasonable wish that money can gratify beyond their reach. Are they happier now? Who shall weigh in the scales youth,

attended by poverty with its grinding anxiety, against advanced years and riches, and say which will go up and which will go down? We sigh sometimes for the days of our youth, but don't we often fill those days with pictures as fanciful as the knights and fine ladies with whom Johnston and his wife and I used to people the old garden in Gray's Inn? We remember the youth and high spirits of early days, but we forget the resinous, cold boiled beef, the pinching and scraping and struggling to make two perverse ends meet, the pleasures we sighed for and had to deny ourselves, the riches we coveted, the ambitious dreams we cherished, the eager looking forward to what we set before us as the desire of our hearts. We were always straining our gaze in front of us then, we are nearly always looking back now, and few there be who can say, "I want nothing more. I live neither in the future nor the past, but in the present, and I am satisfied." It is partly because I cannot truthfully recite that brief formula, and more and more often wander back to the past, that the sight of an empty space, where once was No. 2 Field Court, Gray's Inn, has brought back to me these recollections of the days in which I was a constant and privileged visitor to that vanished building.

TOKE

I HAVE often heard it said that the old-fashioned race of solicitors' managing clerks, grown grey in the service without ever aspiring to the status of admitted solicitors, is dying out, owing principally to the number of young solicitors who crowd into the profession, and are only too glad to obtain such posts as a stepping-stone to attaining their ambition of getting into actual practice. The observation may, I think, be true, at all events as applied to the managing clerks who, in my early days, were employed by solicitors, and were to be seen in their greatest glory at the Chambers of the Judges and Masters in the Rolls Garden hard by Chancery Lane. That particular race has gone through a process of evolution perhaps rather than extinction, because the work which in those days they had to do was far rougher, and, if I may use the expression, coarser than it is now. To give a single illustration—in those good old times all the appointments in the Chambers of certain branches of the Courts were given for eleven o'clock, according to my recollection ; no list was put down of the order in which anything would be taken ; and before two opposing forces could be brought together to do battle before the Judge or Master, one managing clerk nearly always had to shout out many times in stentorian tones the name of the firm represented by the opposing managing

clerk until they ultimately met, like long-lost enemies, and then fought their way together out of the pandemonium of the ante-rooms to the dispenser of Justice, in whose presence they then fought each other. This went on more or less all day, and it was eminently conducive to rough manners, a tendency to waste some time avoidably, and a necessity to waste more of it unavoidably, and the punctuation of days spent in those legal purlieus by intermittent visits to neighbouring establishments for purposes of liquid refreshment. I may add that, for good and sufficient reasons which I decline to mention, the Chambers were sprinkled daily with a horrible scent bearing a second-hand resemblance to Patchouli, and that one of the attendants told me it was not an uncommon occurrence for coals to be abstracted from the scuttles by some of the extremely queer characters who prowled about the Chambers like camp-followers of the legal army. The most determined or prejudiced *laudator temporis acti* will hardly sigh for the restoration of that particular niche in the Temple of Justice as it then existed in Merry England.

I am very far indeed from taking upon myself to condemn bodily as a class the species of elderly managing clerk that more or less thrived under these conditions. He was what his environment made him, and his rough-and-tumble ways, strident voice, and odd costume, varying from that of a dissenting minister in low water to that of a sporting publican, were in very many instances only the outer case of a faithful and able clerk and a kind-hearted, well-meaning man. I am only seeking to point out that the managing clerk of to-day works under different conditions, and that his occupation is now consistent with, and

has produced in him, I think, as a natural and agreeable consequence, more cultivated manners, and a higher standard altogether.

This is all by way of a dull preface leading up to one James Toke, who occupied many years ago the position of managing clerk to a certain firm in the city of London. We sat in the same room for several years, I being a very young fledgling and he a very full-grown bird at the time, but I was not actually working much with him as I was imbibing the rudiments of another branch. Still I necessarily saw a great deal of him, and he comes back to my memory as a dear old, muddle-headed, kindly-hearted specimen of his race. We used to talk to each other in what came to be a curiously free and easy sort of way, as if we were contemporaries in years as well as companions in arms, whereas, in fact, he was nearly old enough to be my grandfather. If anything I think I rather assumed to him the demeanour of the older and more experienced man of the world.

In personal appearance Toke was as nearly like a typical omnibus-driver of that time as anything I can describe. He had a great big, red, smooth-shaved face ; a very sparse population of grey hair inhabiting the territory represented by the top of his head, and a most rotund person, which protruded so much in front of the building line that it was difficult to see how he kept his balance, and, in fact, he only managed it by throwing himself back like the military bandsmen who play big drums suspended from their necks. His walk was a rapid waddle. He wore a sort of wisp round his short neck, and in winter, both in and out of doors, an overcoat of a reddish-brown hue, very like his

complexion, and possibly chosen on that account. In summer he endued himself in a black coat, of which the top button alone answered to the helm, and the two lower portions fell away at an acute angle on either side to make way for his protuberant abdomen. He was much given to bringing back from his business expeditions chickens, small joints, and other articles of food done up in straw baskets, and these were an unfailing source of curiosity and amusement to his fellow-clerks, not excluding the present writer. He lived, as I soon learnt, in a street near Waterloo Station, and his surname without any prefix was inscribed in resplendent brass upon a green front door--whether because he let lodgings, or registered births and deaths, or advised the neighbourhood on legal points (in which case the neighbourhood must have got rather mixed in its notions of the law of England), or only because he was a public character and a pillar of the State down that street, this deponent did not for a long time very clearly understand, but I ultimately concluded it to bear a sort of distant resemblance in Toke's eyes to the putting up of a professional name.

He knew no law whatsoever, and his usefulness (which I am bound to say was not very great, for he was a daily cross to the member of the firm who was his special chief) consisted almost entirely in his experience of the common methods of enforcing payment of debts, which was one of the firm's sources of revenue, as they acted for several large wholesale houses in the city. Hence Toke was accustomed to pay frequent visits of somewhat inordinate length to these clients to receive instructions for letting loose the terrors of the law upon numerous retail traders

in debt to them, and he would bring back these instructions written down by him on slips of paper in a handwriting so awful that I have never seen it equalled except by one other person. I allude to the present writer. He generally spelt the names incorrectly, or put the wrong debt down to the wrong debtor, or forgot to put down the Christian name, and had to go back again to correct such little omissions ; and how the clients put up with him, or the firm continued to employ him I know not, except that he was getting on in years, and was such a well-meaning, self-satisfied old muddler that no one had the heart to do him a bad turn.

In the Judges' Chambers in Rolls Garden, as conducted in the way I have described, Toke was quite at home and a well-known figure. He had his special voice there for calling out names of other firms of solicitors, and it was perfectly different to the voice that proceeded from him on all other occasions. I have never heard such a contrast since except once, when I was being conducted over the Castle at Edinburgh by an official guide, and ventured to ask him a question when he was in the middle of repeating by heart on one note his usual shilling's worth of information. He stopped suddenly, answered (or rather failed to answer) my question in a totally different key, and then hitched on again, at the point of about sevenpence, to the shilling current which I had interrupted for the moment.

I have wondered, since the days when I was an occasional spectator of Toke's wrestlings for and against Justice, how any Judge or Master could possibly have made out what it was that he wanted "Mlord" or "Master" to direct

to be done or not to be done, for he had not the faintest idea how to express himself clearly, and generally forgot what he had been instructed to say or applied it to the wrong case. But Judges and Masters also had a soft spot I feel sure for the old fellow who had been about them for so long, and helped him through somehow, and it would have cut him to the heart if anybody had deprived him of the illusion which he cherished, that he was a most effective advocate in Chambers.

I have mentioned Toke's private abode, but I have yet to tell that I was privileged to see the inside of it. After I had in conversation learnt the address, I was mentioning to him one day that I had passed the door several times, when I had occasion to make my way from Waterloo Station to the city and went by the shortest route, and I alluded in terms that evidently gratified him to the green door and the brass plate. Thereupon he looked up at the ceiling in an odd way that he had, and stopped the task of inaccurately filling up a writ to make the observation that his place was not fit to ask a young gentleman inside, but if I would so far put up with it as to come and have a cup of tea one day, he and Mrs. Toke would regard it as a great honour (he pronounced the aspirate in "honour." Why shouldn't he when it was there?) Then he looked round furtively in the direction of another room, wherein sat his assistant and chief tormentor, who knew much more than he did, and was always showing it in a pert and highly objectionable way, and, lowering his voice to the sort of pitch that he might have used if he had invited me to assist him in passing off counterfeit coin, he preferred a request that I would not mention the matter to any one if

I didn't mind. I cordially accepted the invitation and gave the pledge, and the date was fixed.

On the day before the entertainment I noticed that Toke was perpetually going out of the office, ostensibly on errands of business, but returning on each occasion with a parcel indicating from its exterior that it contained provisions, and that he started for home in the evening so laden that it was wonderful how he managed to balance, suspend, and hold on to all he was carrying. But I did not realise until the next eventful evening came, and I made my way from the office to his house shortly after him, that he had laid in on my account enough food to stock the house for a siege, and that the cup of tea modestly referred to was merely his manner of describing a positively gigantic meal provided for my benefit, out of his kindness of heart and desire to do me honour.

The house had no area or other obstruction between it and a very narrow pavement in a very narrow street, and when the green door was opened to my ring at the bell I was nearly shot head first into the capacious arms of Mrs. Toke, as there was a step down into the passage which I had not observed. The parlour led out of this passage, and I was conducted into that state apartment with fluttering ceremony.

Mrs. Toke was just the sort of wife that I think Toke required. She was large and also good-tempered, but at the same time obviously ruled over him with a benevolent despotism that he did not in the least object to. She also appeared to me to have a capable understanding, and the idea floated through my brain that she would have made the Judges and Masters understand what was wanted much better

than Toke if she were permitted to do his work. Also, she wore on that occasion a bright mauve-coloured silk dress with a flowered pattern on it, and I knew that Toke liked bright colours. She wore no tucker nor collar, and personally I like to see some mark of division between the high-water line of the dress and the neck ; but I don't fancy it was fashionable in the streets near Waterloo Station in those days, and anyhow it was no business of mine if Mrs. Toke thought proper to do without it.

There were also present Toke's only child, who was a daughter of about five-and-twenty, and a young man whom I soon made out to be her accepted lover. They were a little shy in my presence at first, and I in theirs, but when they got used to me their passages of affection were so unstinted as to become trying in a room too small to allow of looking the other way. Toke seemed to feel this a little himself, and once asked, half in jest and half in entreaty, whether they couldn't keep it till they got into the street, which, considering their relative attitudes, was rather an odd way of putting it I thought.

The parlour, though small, was rather imposing. Toke evidently had his sacred arm-chair, and, opposite to it, Mrs. Toke hers. There were also a case of stuffed birds, two large shells and four small ditto, a round table of that now almost obsolete kind that flapped down when required (and also at times of its own accord) into the shape of a half-moon, and had only one leg in the middle from which radiated four branches designed to support it, and also to get in the way of the human species on all occasions ; a few more chairs of uncompromising elegance and forbidding shape, and a what-not, upon which were ornaments such as might have been

picked up in the course of visits to Margate, where Toke's summer holidays were always spent. In a small book-shelf was literature of primeval aspect, and my eye caught during the evening the titles of Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress" cheek by jowl with a "Common Law Practice" some half-century out of date, and evidently discarded at the office on that account; while on the walls were framed prints of three or four judges, for whom, both as a class and as individuals, Toke had a profound respect, though he told stories about them based upon information received from their body-clerks, and proving, if true, that they were very human. There were, also on the mantelpiece highly-coloured daguerreotype portraits of Toke *et uxor*.

These details were not, of course, all taken in at once, but dawned upon me in the course of tea, to which we sat down almost immediately. Tea, did I say; well, yes, certainly there was tea, but it was merely a peg upon which to hang the most portentous meal imaginable. The table did not groan under the weight of it, because the kind of table I have described could only creak, but it did that repeatedly, and the half that was constructed to flap down as aforesaid slanted sufficiently to make me fear that some of the dishes would slide gently off. I think they would have done so if Toke had not been sitting just at the weak point, and they evidently felt it useless to attempt to get beyond the bold front that he presented.

Of the viands I recall (*inter alia*) mutton-chops nearly swimming in butter, shrimps, plum-cake, veal and ham pie, tongue, jam, and marmalade on the table, and piles of muffins and crumpets inside the fender; and not content with tea, Toke had provided drinks of a spirituous kind, in

case I preferred anything in that line to tea. In short, it was a most hospitable if rather overpowering feast, conceived by a kind old fellow who wished to show in every possible way that he was pleased to see me, and that he considered my presence in his abode to be an important event.

I did full justice to the repast, though if Toke had had his desire, I should have eaten enough to sink a ship. The young man engaged to his daughter also made prodigious play with the good things on the table in the intervals between the Acts. I spell *Acts* with a capital A to signify that the young man and Toke's daughter were as good as a play, if only I as audience could have seen it from a rather greater distance. Toke himself and the ladies also were not backward, and altogether we made a surprising hole in the very ample stock of provisions.

Conversation flowed quite freely after we had congealed together for a time at the tea-table, and, as I may perhaps now admit without prejudice, after I had honestly tried to conquer a tendency to be conceited and supercilious because very kind simple people were making a great deal too much of me. I soon found that Mrs. Toke, though she governed her husband's domestic life very much to his benefit, regarded him as the greatest lawyer of that or any other age. She lamented that he had never had the chances he really deserved, and more than hinted that if rights had been righted he might have figured on the Bench. She told me as a fact of mysterious import (as indeed it was) that he often read for pleasure that book on the shelf, pointing to the antediluvian "Common Law Practice" to which I have already referred. She said with honest pride

that he was always thinking of it and talking of it, and that it was surprising to hear all the things he told her, as no doubt it was when he talked of legal subjects. Toke nudged her to be silent, and told me I wasn't to pay any attention to the old lady, but he beamed with satisfaction nevertheless, and when he settled down in his own special chair with a long pipe, after vainly trying to persuade me to take that chair, and more successfully pressing on me an enormous cigar specially provided by him for my entertainment, and of which I managed to survive the first half, he looked as jolly and contented an old boy as ever I have seen. What black-hearted curmudgeon could have grudged him his comforting happy belief in his own legal attainments, or his wife her simple loving pride in him as a great lawyer, prevented by adverse decrees of fate from going down to posterity as a Lord Chancellor?

It was a subject of evident regret to Toke that his future son-in-law was not in the legal profession. The young man was, however, it appeared, a compositor in the employment of a printer who did a good deal in the way of legal printing, and it was a consolation to Toke that there was thus a distant connecting link. He told me in so many words to the young man's face that he had hoped to see his daughter married to a lawyer, whereupon the young man looked guilty and depressed until Toke brightened up with a reference to the printing connection. He sighed again, however, when he remarked to me how sad it was that any one should be printing legal documents and not understand what they meant, little knowing that my mental commentary, which I would not have uttered for worlds, was to the effect that he managed to get along himself very

happily though he suffered from the same disability, forasmuch as he never grasped the point of any legal document, printed or otherwise, in this world.

When the evening waned and I showed symptoms of departure, Toke first pressed me to stay, though not beyond the bounds of true good feeling and delicacy, and then he filled up my glass (not my tea-cup), and the glasses of himself and wife, and his daughter, and his intended son-in-law, and rising delivered himself of a little speech. I remember nearly all the actual words, but if I were to repeat them I should have also to reproduce Toke's little shortcomings in the rendering of grammar and pronunciation, and what he said was so utterly kind and well-meaning that I cannot bring myself to make seeming ridicule of it.

He remarked that he wished before I went to say that he and Mrs. Toke felt it a great honour to have received me in their little home, and had tried in their poor way to show it. He knew it was not what I was accustomed to (nor was it, for I had never had such a glorious blow-out in my life, but that was not what he meant or supposed), but I had come in kindness to see them just as they were, and he was quite sure I would excuse all shortcomings and believe that they had meant well. He then took his wife's hand very tenderly, and went on to say that if their home was humble it was very happy, and his old woman the best in the world, and that his daughter was a dear good girl, and her young man all he could desire except for his never having been in the law (he spoke of the law in that connection as if it were some kind of medicinal bath necessary for health). He then in con-

clusion begged to drink my health, and in hoping that I had passed a pleasant evening, thanked me again for coming, and wished me good luck in the profession, with some flattering remarks upon my eminent fitness for the same, which I fully believed then, though I have had my doubts since.

My health was then drunk with great heartiness, and I rose in turn and tried to say a few words of thanks for the great kindness I had received, and the delightful evening I had spent, and of good wishes for Mr. and Mrs. Toke and the young couple to whose wedding I begged to be invited. (I was, and I went, and some day I may try to describe that event.) I hope I said what I think I did, for I was most unaffectedly touched and grateful.

That evening was a great bond of union between Toke and myself, but whenever either of us alluded to it at the office he used first to look round and satisfy himself that we were not within ear-shot of anybody, and I think he enjoyed making it a deadly secret between us, and I am sure I did.

Not many years after I first knew him the firm superannuated Toke as being past work, and made a generous provision for his old age, which I believe he lived long to enjoy. He was immensely gratified by receiving, on the occasion of his retirement, a clock subscribed for by his fellow-clerks, with an inscription on it of their regard and respect for him ; and at his special request I went one day to the little house with the green door to "see how it looked," when it was installed in the parlour where I had enjoyed his hospitality that evening. It was placed just where he could look straight at it without moving when he

sat in his own chair in his own corner, and this he regarded as a master-piece of ingenuity on his part.

In the scurry of a busy life I lost sight of Toke after he disappeared from my legal horizon, and he must have been gathered to his fathers many years ago now, but I have no doubt that the evening of his life was serene, and that he departed hence believing himself to be a profound lawyer, and enjoying that reputation in the eyes of one person at all events—his faithful old wife. May the turf lie lightly over him.

THE WEDDING OF TOKE'S DAUGHTER

I THREATENED in a previous paper that I would one day try to describe the wedding of Toke's daughter, and that one day having arrived I proceed to do so. For my acquaintance with Toke and the circumstances in which I was asked to be present at the event, see *ante sub titulo* "Toke." I must ask that attention may be paid to this stage direction, as otherwise much that is precious will be lost by the beloved reader which would cut me to the heart.

When the happy day was fixed, Toke began to sound me on the subject of my coming. He said that he considered my offer to come had been made "without prejudice"—a professional joke which so pleased his jolly old soul that he gurgled with laughter for several minutes afterwards. He assured me that he had never taken it seriously, and all he could say was, that if I really would like to see his girl turned off, why, he should be very pleased to see me and think it very kind of me to come. I on my part ratified the promise heartily, and it was easy to see that my doing so was a real pleasure to him, which I thought very natural and proper then, though I really cannot imagine now why it should have been so.

This established another great mystery between Toke and myself, much deeper and more far-reaching than our

previous compact about my going to tea at his house. He begged me to say nothing about it in the office, and he did not until the last moment ask for leave of absence on the eventful day from his chief. In the meantime he and I might have been engaged in a gunpowder plot. The subject was never mentioned by him except when we were alone together, and then only as if he wished to wrap up some hidden meaning beneath words of strange import.

Thus he would look up from his work and suddenly remark :

“I say.”

“Yes, Toke !”

“The fifteenth.”

“All right, I shan’t forget.”

“You know where it is ?”

“Yes, I know—the one in W. B. Road.” The one meant a church, and W. B. was short for Waterloo Bridge, and I put it in that way because the appearance of concealing it delighted him beyond measure, and I think was also pleasing to me.

Then he would suddenly drop the subject and resume writing in a terrible hand with an awful quill-pen that ought to have been pensioned months before.

Another time he would break out without any warning or preface :

“You’ll come to my place afterwards, won’t you ?”

“Rather, Toke, that’s where the fun is coming in.”

“There’ll be a little something spread. My missis ’ll see to that. She’s, as you may say, up to her elbows already.”

“Indeed, I’m quite sure she will do wonders, Toke. Don’t I just remember that tea !”

“I don’t know about wonders.” But he did, and he thought so himself, having a most profound and just admiration for Mrs. Toke and all her ways and works.

Sometimes the old fellow would heave a colossal sigh in the middle of his work.

“Hullo, Toke, what’s that for? Away with melancholy, and remember what a great time is coming on the 15th.”

“Well, you see as regards the 15th, I don’t say it won’t be a regular splash, and I don’t say I ain’t lookin’ forward to it; but you see there’s afterwards, when my girl will be gone. It’s ‘ard missin’ faces you love, and she’s our only one.”

The struggle in his mind between the importance and splendour of the 15th, on the one hand, and the loss of his daughter on the other, was very amusing, and also not without a touch of pathos.

Well, the 15th dawned in due course, and having obtained or taken leave for the day (I forget which, but I hope the former), I dressed myself in my Sunday best and went forth to the one in W. B. road. I may interject here that I had already sent my offering to Toke’s daughter, and that it took the form of a butter-cooler, purchased, not without self-sacrifice, out of a rather slender allowance (the best that could be afforded to me by the best of fathers), which comprehended clothes, lunches, pocket-money, love tokens to the lady who might happen for the time being to have possession of my susceptible heart, and some other simple necessaries of life. The butter-cooler was made of glass, which I am sure will have endured the ravages of time, if treated with care and kept this side up, and a material described

by the vendor as frosted silver. Judging by the price paid and experience since acquired, I am afraid there was a good deal of frost and very little silver in the bargain, and I have a horrible suspicion that, if the article still exists, that part of it must by now be looking as green as grass, and that Toke's daughter may not feel as gratified as she did at the time.

I reached the church just as two carriages drove up, with two horses apiece that were nearly white. The first carriage contained the bride, her father and mother, and a stout man, whom I afterwards learnt to be an uncle on the paternal side, who had come over for the day from Peckham. In the second was the bridegroom, with the wife of the bride's uncle from Peckham, and his own best man and sister, of whom the last-mentioned pair seemed to me, even at first blush, to have a most decided leaning towards each other, but how long they had leant, and whether the leaning afterwards developed into matrimony I know not.

The coachmen wore gloves and favours, very nearly as white as the nearly white horses, and the bride carried a bouquet, which partly, as I conjectured, from a natural desire to exhibit its beauty, and partly because her father, mother, and uncle took up a good deal of room inside, was in a manner of speaking held half out of the window ; and these various unmistakable symptoms of a wedding, coupled with the unusual majesty of two carriages and pairs going in procession along the Waterloo Bridge road, speedily caused a crowd to assemble, so that by the time the party alighted they had to make their way into church through a lane of which human beings were the hedges,

but, unlike hedges, were not by any means silent. When they got into the church quite a representative gathering of the British public residing in those parts followed them, among whom, as the fashionable journalist might say, we noticed three leading washerwomen, one greengrocer's man with a basket of vegetables, five costermongers, a light-weight pugilist, and others whose occupations were not so easy or pleasant to divine. There were also a multitude of children, for whose benefit the entertainment came most opportunely during a holiday season, and also at an early hour of the day when the W. B. road was devoid of public-house excitements in the shape of fights and unceremonious ejectments from the bar entrance of customers who had become quarrelsome in their cups.

And now I reach a point which I have been fearing to approach all along. Naturally, my reader, even if of my own sex, will expect me to give some account of the dresses, and I sigh for that form of descriptive power which generally finds its opportunity in the present day immediately after a dramatic criticism, and is headed "The Dresses;" but I sigh in vain, for it is not in me, and in evidence thereof I make the domestic confession that when I venture upon a remark to the effect that a certain lady, in whose personal appearance I am presumably much interested, is wearing a pretty gown, and that I don't remember to have seen it before, I generally draw down upon myself an acid rejoinder to the effect that she has only worn it at frequent intervals for more than a year, and therefore I have, naturally, not observed it before. I can recall that my own appointments included a walking-stick with a gold top, purchased by me with the

proceeds of a Derby sweepstake in the office, a conspicuous button-hole flower, peg-top trousers of a light pattern (our best sixteen shilling Sydenham make), and a double-breasted silk waistcoat of a flowery pattern, made out of one originally worn by my father, and which procured for me from a pert member of the crowd, at a point in the proceedings presently identified, the title of "young wall-papers." For the rest I remember only such general effects as that the bride presented a vision of white with bronze-coloured boots, and her mother an effect in purple, and that her aunt-in-law's plumage was as green as if she were a parrot. Dear old Toke himself was a fearful and wonderful combination of check trousers, a grey coat and waistcoat that fitted him nowhere, and least of all in the waist, a white hat, and a blue neck-tie, big enough to make colours for a regiment. He was also clothed in conscious pride, as natural, as honest, as innocent, and as beaming as it could possibly be, for the glory of the cavalcade and of the wedding had for the moment entirely eclipsed all conflicting paternal emotions. As for the bridegroom I only remember that he looked, as all bridegrooms do, even in the highest circles, a despicable object of no moment to anybody, and might have sat for his portrait as the god of awkwardness. The bridegroom's best man and sister have left no mark on the sands of time to me except that they leant towards each other as I have already stated.

Immediately he caught sight of me hovering on the steps of the church, Toke let go his wife's arm, and coming straight to me shook hands warmly, while he said with an immense consciousness of humour, "So you 'aven't forgotten the one in W. B. Road," and the wedding pro-

cession, which was forming in pairs on the pavement was quite broken up for the moment, while his wife and the bride and bridegroom also saluted me, and every one else was introduced. This proceeding at first interested but then annoyed the fickle public, and it was just at that period, when I was rather feeling a sense of lofty but gentle condescension towards Toke and his wedding party, that a voice from the crowd called out, "Wy don't you go in and git married instead of making such a fuss over that young Wall-papers." I have been called many names, abusive, facetious, sarcastic, contemptuous, but never before or since that day young Wall-papers, and whatever epithets may yet be in store for me there is nothing more certain in an uncertain world than that I shall never again be called young anything.

But to return to my story. I think that my social status and my cane combined must have caused Toke to regard me as a sort of gold-stick-in-waiting, for he insisted on my going into church first, and after futile resistance I found myself marching up the centre aisle with Toke and party in pairs behind me, and a considerable portion of the attendant crowd behind them.

When we reached the chancel rails I managed to stand aside and follow the marriage service from a more modest position, and I am not ashamed to confess that when all was over and the names had been duly signed in the vestry, I fairly bolted down a side aisle lest Toke should requisition me to precede the bride and bridegroom as they came out, for I really did not dare to face the people outside in that conspicuous position. I was the more glad to have executed this manœuvre when I saw that the crowd had

swelled considerably, owing to the long stoppage outside of the two carriages and nearly white pairs.

I have explained in that previous paper which I have implored my reader to study before approaching this one, that Toke's little house with a green door was situated in that part of the world, and I would fain have slipped round there at first after the service. But not a bit of it. When the party reached the church doors Toke spied me out, and nothing would satisfy him but to ride on the box of one carriage and make me take his place inside ; and there he sat and received quite an ovation as we started off, coupled with free and easy remarks, which he took with the best possible grace as being part and parcel of the day's proceedings. And, indeed, the gibes of the crowd were not ill-natured, for his jolly old countenance would have turned vinegar into claret, and good humour appealed to the public in the Waterloo Bridge road as it did in most places in those days, and perhaps does still, though I am not so sure about it now.

Another crowd, but not nearly such a large one and far quieter, being, in fact, mainly composed of sympathising neighbours, was encountered at Toke's front door—greener than ever, and with the brass plate on it burnished specially for the occasion, and as we descended and filed into the house I could not help seeing that Toke cast one longing lingering look behind at the carriages. He had probably never ridden in a carriage and pair in his life before, except in an omnibus, and was never likely to do so again, and if he resigned the too brief splendour with a little reluctance who shall blame him ? But his hospitable instincts came to the rescue, and he suddenly darted into the house and

came back again with two pots of beer for the coachmen, which they solemnly imbibed and evidently appreciated. And then Toke collected the two pewters and paid the coachmen, and they drove off. They seemed fairly contented, but had a subdued look on them which gave me the idea that funerals were more in their line than weddings, and such was very likely the case.

I wish to refer at once to the only discordant note in the subsequent proceedings, so that I may get it out of the way and not dwell upon it afterwards more than I can possibly help, though I am unable, even at this distance of time, to forget it. Toke's brother kept calling me Master Turner. When I record the fact that I was nineteen and had an allowance, the enormity of this insult will be fairly realised. I glared at him, I turned my head away when he spoke to me, I talked to somebody else, I did everything that the most refined breeding coupled with the most profound indignation could suggest, but it had no effect upon him. Poor, ignorant, tactless fool, he knew no better, and not even the plainly-marked outline of whiskers to come on my face, or the down upon my upper lip, or my deep if intermittent bass voice could rouse him to a sense of what was due to me. But let it pass, as he is presumably no more.

I had never supposed that a larger meal could be squeezed into Toke's parlour than the so-called tea to which I alluded in that previous paper, to which (the paper not the tea) I once again draw the reader's attention, but the wedding feast knocked it right out of time. Well might Mrs. Toke look proud and anxious and fluttered and triumphant by turns. How nine people got into that room, and squeezed in somehow without sitting every minute on

food or putting their elbows in it, or leaning up against it, or falling over it, I shall never know. And then the liquid refreshment ! The bottles were standing upright inside the fire-place (it was summer-time), lying down to rest on the sofa, pretending to be reformed characters in the book-case, from which the usual literature had been removed to make way for them. Surely never was such a wedding feast prepared in such a small space, or with a more anxious desire to rise to the occasion of a great family event regardless of expense or trouble. And surely also never was a banquet more appreciated by guests.

Of course, the bride and bridegroom sat together, and indeed I may say that the bride sat on the bridegroom's knee. Now to be in the immediate vicinity of two people in these relative positions—so immediate that to look the other way for any length of time is impossible—is very embarrassing and even provocative of irritation in a general way, but on this particular occasion there were mitigating circumstances. There were, in fact, only eight chairs in the room, and unless Mrs. Toke had sat on my knee or I had stood or sat on the floor my politeness would have been put to sore straits, for I could not choose but realise that I was the youngest person there, no matter how distinguished. Therefore I was glad when the problem was solved by Mr. and Mrs. Roddick (that was the name of the young couple now mated) in that way.

Throughout the meal Josiah Toke, the brother, pursued that course of persecution to which I have referred, and on which I make no further comment. I was "Master Turner, you will find the 'am delicious," "Master Turner, may I trouble you for them there pickles," "Master Turner,

I will say as my brother and sister-in-law 'ave come out tremenjious this day," and other remarks of like character. I feel sure I must have thrown something at him but for the difficulty of not hitting some one else as well in the small space available, and the restraint imposed on me by my respect for old Toke himself, who was perfectly happy and quite unconscious of my lacerated feelings.

When at length the appetites of all were sated and Nature gave out—not the viands be it understood—Toke winked at me and motioned me to a corner of the room. How we got to that corner and what we passed over in getting there in the way of human beings, plates, dishes, bottles, and other impediments I know not, but I do know that when we did arrive every one else in that very small parlour must have heard our conversation, which Toke began in his most mysterious manner.

"Would you mind?" He began, as if that remark comprehended volumes.

"Mind what?" I answered. I was quite calm, but my countenance may have been a little flushed owing to the heat of the room.

"Saying a word or two to wish 'em luck—if you would I should be so pleased and so would my missis."

I tried to collect my thoughts, and murmured something about his brother proposing it, but even in my nervousness I saw that he had set his heart upon my doing what he asked, so I shook his hand, which he held out in an irresistibly appealing way, and then we did another hurdle race back to our seats, and pretended nothing had happened, and then after a pause I rose and delivered the following remarkably fine oration :

"My dear Toke and Mrs. Toke and friends. We cannot possibly think of anything to-day but the happiness of Mr. and Mrs. Roddick, whom we have seen joined together as man and wife, and whose wedding we have now been celebrating in a most scrumptious feast. I am not married myself yet—"

(Roars of laughter from the ladies and an interjection by Toke's brother, "Go it, Master Turner.")

"But I hope to be one day, and I only trust that I may find such a pretty and charming wife as Mr. Roddick has—"

(Toke rose at this point and solemnly shook my hand again.)

"I am sure we wish Mr. and Mrs. Roddick every joy and happiness, but we must not forget that Mr. and Mrs. Toke are parting with a very dear daughter—"

(Total collapse of Mrs. Toke and momentary shadow on Toke's own cheery face.)

"But then they have no son, and they must look upon Mr. Roddick as a son found instead of fancying that they have lost a daughter—"

(This highly original remark—never made before, in fact, to the best of my belief on any similar occasion and all rights in which are reserved—fairly brought down the house, and Toke's brother so far forgot himself as to say, "Ooray, Master Turner.")

"And so let us drink to the health of Mr. and Mrs. Roddick, and at the same time thank Mr. and Mrs. Toke for their bountiful hospitality on this happy occasion."

We drank the toast in bumpers right heartily, and in truth I really began to feel a little giddy for reasons that

I could not attribute exclusively to the warmth of the room. And then Mr. Roddick got up and said a few very modest manly words, and he gratified Toke beyond measure by expressing his regret that he was not in the law, "of which my father-in-law is a ornament likewise a honour."

Were there more toasts? Yes, I believe there were. The health of Mr. and Mrs. Toke, of Toke's brother and his wife, of the best man and the bridegroom's sister (still leaning towards each other visibly), of my noble self—all these were, I believe, proposed and responded to, but I am not very clear as to the actual words employed, or the order of the toasts. Then I seem to remember that Toke's daughter disappeared in her white dress, and came down shortly afterwards in a blue dress. Then there was a sort of leave-taking, and the bride and bridegroom departed, arm in arm, to their own abode, which was a lodging only about a hundred yards off, and a slipper was thrown after them, and Toke's brother knocked the bridegroom's hat over his head and thought it funny, but the bridegroom didn't nor did I. Then the others melted, and I somehow stayed to the last, possibly in order to prepare my legs for the duty of walking straight, and said a hearty good-bye to Toke and his wife; and having started without my gold-headed stick, I went back again, and softly entering the parlour for a moment to recover that article I saw old Toke seated in his own special chair, with tears coursing down his face, and beside him his good and faithful wife holding his hand and murmuring words of comfort through her own sobs. For the carriages had vanished, the wedding feast was over, and their only child had left them to be very near, but as their hearts told them to be also very far from that time forth.

THE OLD FEUD AND THE NEW LOVE

CHAPTER I

THE WIDE GULF

IT was a notorious fact in the profession that Mr. Thomas Pickering and Mr. George Debenham, constituting together the well-known firm of Paterson, Pickering & Debenham, solicitors in the city of London, were not on good terms with each other. Whether they had agreed better during the lifetime of Paterson, who had been dead more than twenty years though his name survived, was a matter of conjecture now, except to a few of the old stagers in the profession who remembered the firm in Paterson's time. They said that Paterson was so much older than the other two, and had such a control over the business, that the junior partners had not very much opportunity of openly quarrelling in those days, even if so disposed. The trouble came soon after they had cut up the Paterson cake, or, in other words, succeeded to his share, and become partners on exactly level terms. They were also nearly level in point of age.

The original cause of quarrel was involved in obscurity : very likely they had forgotten it themselves now. Jealousy was probably at the root of it, for each of them considered, and always had considered, that he was the pillar of the firm,

and his partner a mere nonentity in the business. On the top of jealousy money most likely raised its ugly head as a cause of dissension, for if Pickering considered that he was carrying the whole burden of the business and that Debenham's efforts were not worth half-a-crown, it would naturally vex the spirit of Pickering to see Debenham pocket half the profits. Contrariwise, if Debenham entertained precisely the converse opinion on the same point he might be expected to groan over Pickering's bloated proportion of the fruit of their labours. As a dry matter of fact, they were both very able men, and the opinion of each of them as to the value to the business of the other was sheer jaundiced-eyed nonsense.

Once started, the quarrel had grown deeper and the gulf between them wider. From open bickering—conducted sometimes in Pickering's room and sometimes in Debenham's room, but always overheard by clerks when their voices ascended to angry heights, as they generally did—they got to avoiding each other as much as possible and exchanging the fewest possible remarks. And from that stage they arrived at the point of ceasing to exchange any direct personal communications whatever with each other, and employed as a medium, for the purpose of conveying anything that absolutely had to be said, Sanderson, the cashier, a quiet, reticent man with a very soothing manner, who had been with the firm many years and was a trusted clerk, and who also, as it happened, had never become a rock of offence to either partner in their disputes.

They differed about everything. The black of Pickering was the white of Debenham. By their partnership agreement various things could only be done by mutual consent.

Only in a case of overwhelming necessity was the mutual consent ever forthcoming. If one of them wanted to dismiss a clerk as an idle, good-for-nothing fellow, the other forthwith endued that clerk in a panoply of imaginary virtues, and would on no account part with him. If there was a vacancy and a clerk had to be engaged, they never agreed in selecting the same person, and generally had to come at last, when the business was really suffering (they always stopped short in their folly at this point), to nominally leaving it to Sanderson to suggest, as it were on his own account, a candidate whom they both really knew to be the best. If Pickering proposed that the firm should take up a particular piece of business, to which their mutual consent was necessary, Debenham would object, as a matter of course, until he saw that it would be a good thing lost to the firm, and then at the last moment he would surly give way. If the proposal came from Debenham, Pickering would play a return match on the same principle.

It may well be wondered—it often was wondered at by those not behind the scenes—why these two men remained in partnership when they positively hated each other, and their association was very much like the string by which two dogs may be tied by the tails. There were two reasons.

First, the very powerful motive of self-interest. Each of them knew that, if the loaf were cut up, it was uncertain what might be the size of his part, and tolerably certain that a good many crumbs, if not slices, would be picked up by hungry professional sparrows, and that the scandal and loss of prestige, to say nothing of the expense of two separate offices and staffs instead of one, would be all to the bad in the reckoning up.

Secondly, since Sanderson had been instituted as a go-between he had operated as a safety-valve to both partners, who let off at him all their otherwise suppressed steam against each other. And the odd thing was that Sanderson was always perfectly quiet and respectful, and never took any liberty with either of them, but passed on from one angry partner to the other exactly as much or as little as he thought expedient, and that each partner, when he liberated his soul by abusing the other partner to Sanderson, knew perfectly well that Sanderson would edit to any extent all the savage messages of which he was the bearer. They both had also an odd way on these occasions of flattering Sanderson himself as if to enlist his sympathy.

An illustration of the Sanderson system will perhaps make it clearer. He entered Pickering's room one morning with a message from Mr. Debenham to the effect that there was a large balance at the bank, and that he suggested the drawing out by the partners of £1000 each. Sanderson respectfully delivered his message, and Pickering, who happened to be particularly irritable that morning because a personal client had called yesterday, and in his absence had seen Debenham, who had sent in to him a curt memorandum of what had passed, at once broke out in red-hot fashion, "Oh! that is what Mr. Debenham says, is it! Well then, Sanderson, you will please just tell him from me that I utterly object to do anything of the kind. I know I may trust you, Sanderson, and I don't mind telling you that Mr. Debenham would ruin this business if he could, and, what's more, you may tell him I said so. He is always wanting to draw money, whether it is there or not." (This was perfectly untrue and he knew it, and knew

that Sanderson knew it, but he was now riding on the whirlwind, and the truth was not in him when taking that form of exercise.) "I do all the work, and all he thinks about is grabbing money that he doesn't earn, and you may tell him that too, Sanderson. I don't think I have ever said this before, Sanderson" (he had at least a hundred times), "and I don't like saying it now, but I expect you know it pretty well already, for you are an observant man. Please tell Mr. Debenham every word of it, and perhaps he'll like it."

Sanderson gave a deferential bow which deprecated the compliment paid to him and committed him to nothing, and then went on an embassy to Debenham.

"If you please, sir, Mr. Pickering says that he doesn't think it would be wise to draw anything out just at present."

"Oh, does he say that? Perhaps he'd prefer our never drawing any money at all, and would like me to give it all back to the clients. Go and ask him, will you, Sanderson?"

Sanderson did not go, because he knew it was not meant that he should, and Debenham at once resumed:—

"Here I work in this blessed office, day after day, early and late, till I can't call my soul my own, and keep the whole business together, and, forsooth, my esteemed partner will not even let me take my miserable half of the profits when the money is lying idle in the bank waiting to be drawn. Sanderson, you have been in a confidential position here for many years, and know that what I am saying is true, because I feel sure that nothing escapes your notice, though you are too loyal to say anything. It is perfectly unbearable, and I request you to tell Mr.

Pickering from me that I consider his rejection of my proposal a mean, ungentlemanly act, nothing more or less."

But again Sanderson did not go, and again the reason was that he knew Debenham was only blowing off steam and that it was doing him good.

"Well, Sanderson," growled Debenham after a pause, "I suppose I must put up with Mr. Pickering's nice little ways once more. But flesh and blood can't stand much more of it, and you will see a change in this firm before long. I think I know which of us *you* will cast in your lot with, Sanderson, when the day comes."

He meant, of course, himself, but as he had said the same thing to Sanderson at frequent intervals during the last twenty years, and as Sanderson, after long experience of both his masters, had not the remotest belief that the threatened break-up of the firm would ever take place, that astute and reticent but perfectly loyal person merely turned the subject with the remark, which he made with the faintest approximation to a smile on his face :

"I think, sir, if I might venture to say it, that if in a few days' time I were to go and tell Mr. Pickering that there's a lot of money in the bank, and doesn't he think it would be as well for the firm to draw some out, he might very likely say he quite agreed, and tell me to ask you."

Fuming and fretting as he was, Debenham was quite alive to the fact that the suggestion offered a way of escape from the deadlock, and with a gesture from him in which disgust at the situation and acceptance of the hint were blended in equal proportions, Sanderson melted. I may add that if the suggestion of drawing out money had come from Pickering, Debenham would have immediately

objected, and that both would probably have starved rather than give in but for the judicious Sanderson, who always made the same suggestion as on the present occasion and always with the desired result.

In his heart of hearts Sanderson thought them, in all matters personal to themselves as a firm, a pair of idiots. But he never showed it, and he never said so even to Mrs. Sanderson.

Both partners were married, but whereas Pickering had only one child, a daughter, Debenham had several children, boys and girls, and at the time to which I am referring his eldest son, Hubert, was just of an age at which his career in life had to be chosen. He had been to college and taken a very fair degree. Naturally, his father bethought him of his own branch of the law, and Hubert being quite willing, the question was whether he should be articled to his father or placed elsewhere. There was a good deal to be said pro and con, and among the cons was the unfortunate schism, not to say yawning gulf, between the two partners. But even as to that, I am afraid that Mr. Debenham chuckled to himself as he referred to a clause in the partnership agreement which allowed either partner to receive any son as an articled clerk. The thought that he could do it whether Mr. Pickering liked it or not was fragrant to him, as also was the reflection that Pickering, as it happened, had no son and could not therefore exercise a similar privilege. To do him only justice, he did also consider Hubert's interests, and whether it would be to his disadvantage to come, as it were, into the middle of a feud, but he decided that if he kept the lad close under his own eye and confined him to his own work, there was

no need for him to see anything of Pickering, and that it really, as far as his son was concerned, would be much as if there was no such being as the hated Pickering in the world. All this he carefully explained to Hubert, who implicitly trusted his father's guidance, and readily accepted the idea that he would be able to steer clear of Pickering. The only doubt he expressed to his mother was whether he could resist punching Pickering's head when they did happen to meet in the office, for I need hardly say that in the minds of Mrs. Debenham and of the children too, as soon as they were old enough to learn it, Debenham was clearly understood to be tied in business to a monster in human form.

So it was decided that Hubert should be articled to his father, and one morning Sanderson entered Mr. Pickering's room on a mission that made him feel as nearly nervous as his calm temperament permitted. "If you please, Mr. Pickering, Mr. Debenham asked me to mention that his eldest son is being articled to him, and he begins his time here to-morrow."

Pickering jumped up as if a squib had been let off under him.

"His son—articled—here—it's an outrage! What on earth does he mean! Nothing will induce me to give my consent. One Debenham in this office is quite enough for me, and you may tell him I said so, Sanderson. Tell him, please, in those very words."

He was so angry that he really did mean Sanderson to go and repeat what he had said this time. But Sanderson did not move.

"Mr. Debenham hoped it would be agreeable to you,

sir" (Debenham had not hoped anything of the kind. I am afraid he hoped the exact opposite), "but he asked me just to mention that it was in the agreement."

"What agreement—God bless my soul, what agreement?"

"I suppose he meant the partnership agreement, sir."

Pickering bounced off to a box in the room with his initials on it, and unlocking it brought out the partnership agreement, which he feverishly looked over. He murmured half aloud as he did so:—

"Partnership terms—bankers—style of firm—accounts—just and faithful in all dealings—drawings—death—dissolution—articled clerks—yes, by the Lord, he's got me—the coward!" He threw the document back into the box and locked it with a vicious snap, as if he wished he had got Debenham under lock and key too.

"Sanderson, my partner is legally entitled to bring his brat here whether I like it or not, but you, as a tried and faithful member of the staff, and, I may say, an old friend, will understand what I feel when he foists on me a son of his, knowing that I have no son myself to bring here, and that if I could prevent it by any mortal means I would. It is a scandalous act, and I feel sure you must think so, though I quite understand your silence. Go to Mr. Debenham, please, and say that I have received his message, and that I feel I cannot object to what I regard as taking a scandalous advantage of me. Tell him that I request him to keep his son out of my sight, and that under no circumstances is he to touch any work of mine, and that if, when his son's articles expire, we are still in partnership (which I don't mind telling you, Sanderson, is most unlikely),

I will never consent to his remaining here, even as a clerk at £2 a week."

This last speech, unlike the first outburst before he realised Debenham's rights, was not intended for consumption except by Sanderson, but the delivery of it did Pickering no end of good.

Sanderson went back to Debenham, who was awaiting his return with much interest, and said that Mr. Pickering felt he could not object, but thought that it would be better if Mr. Debenham's son worked entirely with his own father.

Whereupon Debenham, reading between the lines of Sanderson's translation, laughed aloud and said that the suggestion was quite superfluous, as he would rather see his son sweep a crossing than have anything to do personally with Mr. Pickering in his work.

So all things were beautiful when Hubert began to serve under his articles.

Hubert had been in the office some days before Pickering saw him, and then they came across each other in the outer office. They eyed each other very curiously, and very much like two dogs who sniff at each other in a way that may or may not portend a coming battle. Hubert saw for the first time the man who had done his best to make Hubert's father's life bitter, and Pickering saw the son of the partner whom he detested, thrust too into the office most indecently and without a semblance of consulting his wishes. So there was no love to spare on either side.

Hubert was obliged to admit to himself that Pickering's face, though it wore a most unpleasant expression at that moment, was not by any means unattractive; on the contrary, there was rather a frank open look about the eyes, and

a suggestion at the corners that they might twinkle on occasion ; the forehead was lofty, the jaw firm but not heavy, and the whole face clean cut and unmistakably intellectual. Hubert felt instinctively that it was the face of a clever man, and it struck him with surprise that a man who must have good abilities should allow Hubert's father to do all the work, that being, of course, one of the articles of religion to which the Debenham family had been brought up.

Pickering, for his part, saw in Hubert one of the nicest-looking young fellows he had ever cast eyes on. A handsome and an honest face had Hubert. He had curly golden brown hair, large blue eyes, a colour that a maiden of eighteen might have envied, a little moustache that was just enough to be manly and not too much to take away from the general appearance of youth in all its glory of high spirits and unimpaired digestion, and features that were regular but not the least effeminate. He was a strapping young fellow too, with a fine broad pair of shoulders. He was every inch a man and every inch a boy at the same time.

There was no getting over the fact that Pickering liked the look of the lad. The ugly scowl on his face melted in spite of himself in the sunshine of that bright young face, and he caught up a letter-book and hurried away with a dreadful suspicion in his mind that if he had stayed another moment he might have smiled, and that for such an act of criminal weakness and inconsistency he never could have forgiven himself.

He was rather thoughtful that afternoon, and at dinner in the evening he said abruptly to his wife, "I saw Debenham's boy to-day for the first time."

“Like father like son I suppose,” replied Mrs. Pickering, who adored her husband, and therefore regarded Debenham as a disgrace to humanity.

“Hum—no—at all events not in looks I am bound to say, though I don’t know anything of his disposition. He’s a nice-looking boy, I must admit.” The words “without prejudice” rose to his lips as necessarily following this sentence, but being in the bosom of his family he repressed the qualification without which a lawyer making an admission would, generally speaking, rather be carried away lifeless.

Mrs. Pickering sniffed in an uncompromising sort of way. Fond and dutiful wife as she was, she had not had Debenham rubbed in for the last twenty years, like salt, mustard, and pepper combined, as the bane and curse of her lord’s existence, without hating Debenham with a loathing compared to which her husband’s feelings were amiable. “One thing we may be quite sure of,” she said, “whatever his looks may be, and that is that he has heard nothing at home but wicked lies about you ever since he was old enough to hear anything.”

Generally, such a sentence would have started off Pickering on the old but never worn-out subject for half-an-hour, but he seemed out of sorts, and after moodily toying with his glass for a minute or two he only said, “Yes, I suppose so.”

Now this little conversation had taken place in the presence of a third person, to wit, Violet Sybil Pickering, now aged nineteen, only child of Mr. and Mrs. Pickering, and the joy and pride of their lives. She was not only exceedingly pretty, but also a very sweet amiable girl, and the

Debenham topic always grated on her, for it invariably made her father and therefore her mother fret and fume, and use hard words that never seemed to do the least good to them or anybody else, and being accustomed to have her own way with them in all things (she would have been utterly spoilt if it had not fortunately been, as it was, a good and loving way) she had done everything in her power to stop the subject at home. She had been known to put her pretty little hand over her father's mouth, and tell him to be quiet, and had even instituted a system that she called "Debenham forfeits," whereby a fine of one shilling was imposed on the offending parent every time the name was mentioned, and the proceeds distributed in certain charitable ways.

On the present occasion Violet did not attempt to veto the subject, and even forgot to collect a shilling from each parent. On the contrary, she chimed in, "Well, mamma, whatever he has been told he is in the office now, and can see the truth for himself, and I am sure he will like papa, whatever he has been brought up to believe."

"He won't have any chance of liking or disliking me personally, Violet, for he is to work, of course, entirely with his father, and I shall very seldom see him, and never speak to him when I do."

"But if he's nice, papa, why shouldn't you speak to him?"

"Violet, Violet," broke in her mother, "are you forgetting all that your father has suffered from that man? Is it likely that he can have any friendly feeling towards the son, especially considering the way that the boy has been forced into the office?"

"All I know, mamma, is that papa is nice, and from what he says this young Debenham may be nice too, and I don't see why they should not be friendly to each other. We are not living in that place—what is it?—Corsica, where if two families quarrel they all kill each other in every successive generation long after they have forgotten what it was about."

Mrs. Pickering looked up in the direction of the ceiling in mild depreciation of these heretical sentiments. Mr. Pickering reached out a hand in which his beloved daughter immediately put hers, but he said nothing. He was indeed strangely silent and absent-minded that evening.

On the same evening Hubert said to his father as they went home together, "I say, father, I ran across Mr. Pickering in the office to-day."

"Was he rude to you?" blazed out Debenham hotly, every paternal instinct on the alert.

"Not at all. He said nothing, and, of course, I said nothing. He looked pretty black I thought when he caught sight of me, and I suppose I didn't look very amiable either, but he didn't seem to keep it up, and when he bolted off like a rabbit, I thought he was going to smile or say something."

"He smile at a son of mine! You don't know what you're talking about, my boy."

"He's got rather a clever face, hasn't he, father—looks as if he could do good work if he tried. Pity he doesn't."

Mr. Debenham abruptly changed the conversation. The truth was that he was strangely disturbed by this ingenuous observation. It seemed to take him between wind and water. For all these years he had persuaded himself, told

his wife, told his children, told his most intimate friends that he did all the work, and that if it were not for him the business would fall to pieces, and that Pickering was a vampire who sucked half the profits, and was no good to the firm whatever. And now his own son, on seeing Pickering for the first time, pronounced him to be clever looking. But that was not all, it was only a very little bit of the reason for his feeling agitated in mind. His son took it as a matter of course at present that Pickering did nothing. But he would soon get to know more about the office, and however closely associated with his father's personal work, he must necessarily form an opinion for himself before long as to the conduct of the firm's business as a whole. Would he then share his father's estimate of the relative value of the services of the two partners? Would he be loyal to the Debenham traditions and grievances, or would he find virtues in Pickering, and perhaps even consider him the better man of the two? Would he—here was where the shoe was really pinching tight—would he perhaps think that his father had been hugging imaginary wrongs and doing injustice all these years to his partner, and would he despise him for doing it? Deep down in Debenham's heart of hearts, buried under a tangled growth of jealousy, bitterness, envyings, strife, self-deception, and other weeds, was the knowledge that Pickering was not a fool, was not an idle man, but a hard worker, and in real, sober, honest truth did his fair share of labour, and did it well. Hubert quite unconsciously had awakened in his father's breast doubts that made him very uncomfortable indeed, uncomfortable above all, because his own son, whom he loved, suddenly seemed to him to be getting

ready to play the part of an accuser. He had thought of many things before deciding to bring him into the office, but never of this.

From the necessity of the case Pickering was bound now and again to come across his partner's son, and, steel himself as he would, the lad grew upon him more every time he caught sight of his bright winning face, and every time he found it more difficult not to smile, and every time too Hubert found it more difficult to regard him in the light of a fiend. The plain truth was that they were attracted to each other, and that was all about it. At last a smile forced its way through, and Hubert responded to it with another, and they got to smile regularly. Then Pickering nodded to Hubert, because his head would have it so whether he liked it or not, and Hubert gave back a nice friendly little half bow—not a nod, but something more respectful.

And then a great thing happened. They spoke. Pickering in a flurried sort of way, as if he were doing something wrong, asked Hubert if he had seen Letter-Book 39, and Hubert said he had not, but would find it in a minute, and darting off he ravaged the office till he got it, and as Pickering had fled in the meantime actually took the book into that villain's own room. Pickering coloured visibly, whether with pleasure or embarrassment or both history does not tell, as he thanked him.

Hubert had said nothing more to his father about Pickering until now, and the latter had avoided the subject himself, having upon him constantly the same feeling that his son might see Pickering with very different eyes to his own. But Hubert felt it right to mention that he had

actually exchanged civil words with the enemy, and he told his father what had occurred, adding in perfect simplicity, "He seems as if he wished to be civil to me, father, and I hope you don't mind my being civil too, as, of course, it's much more pleasant than for him and me to be scowling at each other ; but if you don't think it's quite straight to you of course I will shut him up."

The answer was rather a long time coming, and came slowly then, and as it seemed with difficulty. "I don't mind at all, Hubert. I don't expect or wish you to see with my eyes, and if my partner goes out of his way to be civil to you by all means respond to his kindness. He and I have been at variance, as you know, for a great many years, but there is no reason why you should be involved in the differences—and perhaps—we have neither of us been altogether just in judging of each other." These last words came very slowly indeed. And then the father relapsed into a brown study.

So Pickering and Hubert came to nod and speak to each other, and one day Pickering actually asked him, if disengaged, to do a little piece of work for him, and praised him when he had done it.

A curious change came over the partners themselves at this point. Sanderson's occupation as go-between still continued, but it took quite a different form. Instead of translating more or less violent abuse into polite but always negative language, he was now the medium through which communications of quite a different nature passed. If Pickering made a suggestion Debenham would politely agree to it, and *vice versa*. Sanderson was greatly puzzled, as well he might be, and said to himself, for he never

spoke on such a subject to any one else, that it was a queer start, and he wondered if, after all these years, they were coming to their senses.

It happened on very rare occasions and as a special treat that Violet Pickering came to the office in the family carriage for her father at a rather earlier hour than his usual time of leaving for the day, and it was understood that on these occasions he was generally carried off to the West End and made to stand treat in divers ways, he pretending to grumble all the time and enjoying his daughter's pleasure hugely.

One of these events occurred after Hubert had been at the office a few months. To his great surprise an exceedingly pretty girl (well dressed too, though she would have looked bewitching in sackcloth) walked into the outer office, where he happened to be at the time, and also happened at the moment by an accident to be alone.

The young lady knew most of the clerks by sight, and immediately she set eyes—such big grey eyes—on a strange and particularly handsome young man she knew instinctively who it was, and became so confused that she could not utter a word. Hubert, who had no idea who she was, felt confused also from a different cause, but he managed to ask her whom she wished to see and to offer her a chair.

“I’ve called for papa, thank you—I’ll—I’ll—wait till one of the clerks comes in.”

Then it dawned on Hubert who she was, and other feelings dawned on him at the same moment. She was a divinity, he thought, nothing less.

“I think I am speaking to Miss Pickering,” he said, all

in a fluster, and with a heart beating twenty to the dozen. "Pray allow me to tell your father you're here. Would you like to see the paper?" This last sentence was merely the outward and visible expression of a feverish desire to do some service to the beautiful vision before him, for in fact the only paper kept on the premises was a legal periodical not possessing maddening interest to the ordinary reader.

"No, thank you. You're very kind, but please don't trouble to tell my father. I can wait here quite well."

But he must trouble, he would trouble, he intended to trouble, and he meant to do it too before any other clerk came in to take the privilege out of his hands, which must happen in a moment, so off he dashed to Mr. Pickering's room.

"Mr. Pickering, your daughter has just come, and she's in the outer office waiting. May I show her in?"

"It's very kind of you, Debenham, but I really must not let you act as conductor to my daughter. I will come out to her myself," and before Hubert could say more Pickering hurried out to his daughter followed by Hubert, and then took her back into his room while he finished one or two matters before going off with her.

Hubert lingered about the outer office meanwhile. I am afraid he made a pretence of violently looking up something till Mr. Pickering came out with his daughter and when that event happened Hubert blushed violently, and felt as if an angel were passing through the very matter-of-fact office of Paterson, Pickering, and Debenham. But, unfortunately, the angel only did pass through with her father, who nodded kindly to Hubert, and when she had vanished

it seemed to Hubert as if the whole place had suddenly grown shabby and disgusting. The clerks who had been out of the room had returned, and as Hubert slowly made for the room in which he sat, with a dreadful sinking inside him, he heard one of them say to another, "Isn't she scrumptious?" He felt it would be a relief to brain that impious clerk.

"Well, Violet," said her father as they drove away, "you have seen young Debenham. Do you like the looks of him or not?"

"Ye-es, papa, I think he is good-looking."

"You don't seem quite sure about it."

"Oh yes!" she said hurriedly, "I am quite sure."

"Was he civil to you?"

"Yes, very civil indeed—in fact, very nice; but, of course, he only said a few words." Was there just the faintest tinge of unconscious regret that there had not been a chance of his saying more words?

"I like the lad. I can't help it. I only wish his father were like him."

The addition of those last words to any kindly reference to Hubert was a matter of course. Without them Pickering would have been ashamed of owning to a liking for Hubert. He was rather ashamed of it as it was. But, somehow, they did not come with the old air of savage, one-sided, blind prejudice and conviction. They were said more as if he were discharging a duty.

Then Violet said something so daring that, with all her confidence in her father's unfailing indulgence, she trembled a little as she said it, and spoke very timidly, "Don't you think, papa, that perhaps—only perhaps—Mr. Debenham

has some good in him after all? You know what evil feelings he has about you, and I expect he thinks you ever so wicked, when,"—she faltered a little, and put her two little hands on his arm in the very middle of Regent Street, "when you are the best and kindest old dear in the world!"

Pickering oddly enough said nothing at all—not a word.

Solicitors never shed tears. It is not allowed by the Rules of Court. When Pickering put his handkerchief to his left eye it must have been to get a fly out, and when he blew his nose a moment afterwards he must have had symptoms of a cold in the head. I say must, because there is no other possible hypothesis that I can admit for a moment.

CHAPTER II

THE BRIDGE THAT SPANNED IT

ALAS for poor Hubert! In those few minutes the fatal arrow had been shot, and, waking or sleeping—but there was not much sleeping—the whole world to him was Violet Pickering. What would he not give to see her again—but what possible chance had he of doing so? The two fathers at deadly enmity—the two families therefore at opposite poles. His only chance would be that when she came to the office again, perhaps months hence, he might—or might not—see her, and most likely two clerks at least would be looking on if he did. How could he live on the slender hope of such a momentary sight of her as that? How could he live at all for that matter? Would not early

death be a decided relief? Then why was he so horribly strong and well that he could scarcely hope to secure oblivion in the silent tomb? Should he hang about the Pickering abode, disguised as a sailor for instance, and try to waylay her, and then disclose himself, and tell her that he really could not help it and must speak to her or perish? No, he could not do such a caddish thing as that. Well, then, what could he do? Nothing, absolutely nothing. That sweet angel was as far removed from his sight, his hopes, his life as if she literally were an angel and had wings, and rather preferred living next door to one of the most distant stars than otherwise.

From the foregoing observations it will have been possibly inferred that Hubert had fallen desperately in love at first sight, and so have I often, dear reader, and so have you, I daresay, but it never came to anything in my case, and I only hope you have got on better.

Now desperate cases require desperate remedies, and after enduring an amount of suffering that was cruel to bear, and exhibiting at home and abroad a condition of mind that made folks wonder what on earth was the matter with him, and his father in particular to become quite anxious, Hubert came to a resolve of supreme importance.

One evening as he and his father were on the way home from the office, Hubert began, with a large lump in his throat, as follows: "Father, Mr. Pickering has been most awfully kind to me since I came to the office."

His father was genuinely pleased to hear it and said so.

"I was wondering whether it would be a civil thing if—if—I were just to call there."

“Good heavens, what an idea, Hubert! It’s not to be thought of for a moment. You may be sure that Mrs. Pickering and the daughter hate us like poison, and you would expose yourself to a most humiliating snub.”

This was a fair beetle-crusher, but Hubert was braced up to do or die, and faced the music like a man.

“Oh! but, father, of course I shouldn’t go without asking Mr. Pickering if it would be agreeable to them. I—I—just happened to see Miss Pickering in the office some days ago for a moment accidentally, and she must have known who I was, and she wasn’t—I mean she was——”

“My dear boy,” interrupted Debenham, “being a lady at all events she couldn’t very well say anything abusive to you in the office, but it’s a totally different pair of shoes when you come to put yourself at their mercy by going to their own house; and if you ask Pickering, the answer will only be that it wouldn’t be at all agreeable, but very much the reverse, and then it will be very difficult for you to be on friendly terms with him in the office afterwards. Don’t think of it, Hubert.”

Beetle-crusher No. 2. But still Hubert persisted, and gained his point. His father was very much averse to it, but was at last induced to say that, if Hubert, against his advice, was prepared to take the risk of getting a flat refusal from Pickering, he should not forbid him to make the attempt.

So Hubert tackled Pickering in his room next day, with a much bigger lump in his throat. “Mr. Pickering, I hope you won’t think it a very great liberty, but I wanted just to ask you if I might come and call on you—and—and the ladies some Saturday or Sunday afternoon. You have

been so kind to me since I have been here, and it would be a great pleasure to me if I might come and—and, in fact, just call."

Pickering, mightily astonished, looked into the lad's blushing, confused, but earnest face, that he had grown to like so much. He paused a few moments, embarrassed by the obvious awkwardness of being on friendly social terms with the son of his arch-enemy Debenham, but his liking for the young man, a certain invisible change that had been going on lately in his own habit of thought about his partner, and the remembrance of the chord that Violet had touched the other day when they were out together, all combined to fight for Hubert.

"Debenham, I can't help confessing that you take me by surprise, and there are reasons, regrettable and painful reasons, that make it difficult for me to answer you. But if you are able to assure me that in coming to my house you would not be disregarding your father's commands or even his wishes, I shall be very glad to see you, and I am sure can answer for my wife and daughter as well. It would be even more difficult than it is for me to say yes on these conditions if I did not like you, Debenham, but frankly I do." He held out his hand very kindly as he said this, and as Hubert took it he felt so overjoyed by his success that on very slight provocation he would have executed a *pas seul* there and then. He assured Mr. Pickering that his father had no objection whatever, and added, with a little hesitation of manner, that his father's only fear had been that Mr. Pickering might not like it. "Well, you will be able to tell him that he need not have been afraid," said Mr. Pickering, with a pleasant smile.

“Come next Saturday afternoon if not better engaged.”
Better engaged, indeed !

Hubert recounted to his father that evening all that had passed, not omitting Pickering’s closing words and the smile that accompanied them. He had noticed that of late his father had rarely mentioned Pickering’s name, and never in connection with any grievance or fresh dispute ; and notwithstanding the selfish pre-occupation for which the condition, usually and absurdly described, for want of a better term, as being in love, is notorious, it had dawned upon him that he might possibly be the means of bringing about peace between the two partners ; and he fancied too that Pickering’s last words might have been intended, if not as a whole olive branch at least as a tiny twig from off it.

Would Saturday afternoon ever come ? Of course it would and did, and it always does, but I know of few things in life stranger than the enormous difference in the length of the same measurement of time to different people. If we look backward a good deal and forward very little (that is my case) it flies. If we look backward very little, and all our thoughts are concentrated on some particular event to come, it lags and drags and seems to us to stand still. And yet, youthful reader, the same weeks, days and hours that refuse to move on for you are racing past me so fast that I can hardly count them, and what is more I can’t exchange with you—I can’t even offer to hand you one week of time going at my rate in exchange for a week going at yours. But a truce to moralising, and let us come to the Saturday afternoon call.

There was a lot of fluttering in various bosoms around

that call. The Debenham family in general were in a flutter because it was such an extraordinary event, such an earthquake of family traditions and funereal pyre of shibboleths. Hubert himself was in a flutter, principally for reasons that nobody knew anything about, though he too was excited also from a family point of view. The Pickerings were in a flutter for exactly the same reasons as the Debenhams; and Violet personally, well I don't say that she had not occasionally found herself thinking of the handsome lad that her father—yes, her father—liked, but of course only because her father did like him, and not for any other reason whatsoever, certainly not. I don't say that when she heard of his coming she did not feel excited and glad, because she did. It showed that he liked her dear father so much that he wished to know him better, as indeed he well might, and that was very nice of him, and so it made her feel glad he was coming. There was no other reason. How could there be?

So he came, and when he rang the bell he did not know where his heart was, but he rather thought it had got loose somehow and was in his mouth. And when the door opened and he was shown in, he asked himself whether he was walking on his legs or the other way up. But when he got into the drawing-room and saw Mr. and Mrs. Pickering and Violet, at least he seemed to see at first bits of Mr. and Mrs. Pickering and an entrancing heavenly vision in pink that turned out to be Violet, then he pulled himself together, and tried to say how glad he was to see them and how kind it was of them to let him come.

Mrs. Pickering had intended in her own mind to be a little stiff at first and unbend gradually, and had in fact had

a sort of mental dress rehearsal, but as she said afterwards there was no notwithstanding that boy, and before he had been there a quarter of an hour she found herself talking to him as if they were old friends. Mr. Pickering, too, did everything in his power to make Hubert feel at home, and the only silent member of the family was Violet, who did not say much, and said what she did say in rather a shy sort of way. Indeed, her mother was rather concerned about it, and spoke to her afterwards. She reminded Violet that she, Violet, had always tried to make her father and mother feel less bitter about Mr. Debenham.

“And now,” she said, “now that your father is noble enough to overlook all the bitter things he has suffered from the father, and to heap coals of fire on his head by showing such kindness to the son, you seemed to shrink back, dear, as if you had no welcome for him.”

“I am very sorry you thought so, mamma ; I did not mean to be unkind, indeed, I didn’t.”

Oh, foolish, foolish Mrs. Pickering ! Had you no eyes to see how Violet’s face was suffused with a lovely crimson colour when Hubert looked at her, as he very often did, or spoke to her as he did whenever he had a chance ? Had you no ears to hear the little tremble in her own voice when she answered him ? Had you no instinct to guess that the hesitation, the silence, the timidity, were only heralds of the dawn of deeper feelings that would come to mean a million times more to Hubert than all the kindness that you could heap upon him, however gratefully and gladly accepted ? Were you never young, Mrs. Pickering, or had your senses only grown dim after so many years of satisfied affection ?

Hubert stayed a long time and had tea with the family, and played a game of billiards with Mr. Pickering, at which Violet shyly officiated as marker. He played very well, and Mr. Pickering played very badly; but do you think he allowed himself to beat him hollow, or even to win? Not at all. The artful young man just toyed with the game, and Mr. Pickering, who won by two points on more than sufferance — positive unbridled indulgence — was delighted with himself beyond measure.

At last he had no excuse for staying any longer and was fain to go. Mr. and Mrs. Pickering said many kind words at parting, and begged him to come and dine with them some evening soon, which he eagerly said he should be delighted to do. When it came to Violet's turn to say good-bye to him she only said "good-bye," nothing more, as he took her hand and held it a moment or two longer than was absolutely necessary in the interests of politeness. But it is astonishing what a world of meaning can consciously or unconsciously be put into the shortest and simplest words, backed up by a pair of beautiful grey eyes. Anyhow, Violet's simple little good-bye was carried away by Hubert as a treasure beyond price, and he walked home on air. I only walk on air myself now when I have in digestion and dream, but that is neither here nor there.

There were only two thorns in the rose. One was that they had not mentioned a day for his coming to dinner. Would it be a few days, or weeks, or even months hence? Would Mr. and Mrs. Pickering—oh, torture!—possibly forget it altogether, or not have really meant it, and only said it out of politeness? The bare thought of such a thing almost brought back a momentary desire for the

silent tomb ; but Hubert was naturally of a cheerful disposition, and he fought against these tragic possibilities, determined to hope that before long the invitation would be received. The other thorn was the recollection of having seen at the Pickerings' abode no less than three different photographs of a fine handsome man in uniform (with several medals on his breast in one of them too), older certainly a good deal than Violet, but still in the prime of life. He could not help thinking now and again of the dreadful possibility that that swaggering military officer might have captured Violet's heart before he, Hubert, had realised that if he could not possess it himself life must be to him a hideous grey waste, with a perpetual yellow fog thrown in. As a matter of fact, the officer in question was a younger brother of Mrs. Pickering, and therefore within the degrees of affinity prohibited according to the Prayer-Book, but then you see Hubert did not know that then, and love generally manufactures torments for its victims as well as fairy bowers, especially in its early stages.

He had not long to wait for the invitation for which he was ravenously hungering. Before many days Mr. Pickering said to him one morning, "You promised to come and dine with us one evening, Debenham" (what a very delicate and jolly way of putting it, thought Hubert), "will you come home with me next Thursday evening, if you are at liberty. You might go straight from here with me, and don't trouble to bring any dress clothes, as we shall be quite by ourselves."

To record Hubert's answer is superfluous. It is more to the point to observe that when Hubert told his father

of the invitation, the latter said, "How very kind of Pickering; please tell him that I said so." These were the first words of good feeling towards his partner that Debenham had uttered for many, many years. Hubert heard them with joy and thankfulness in his heart. It came home to him again that perhaps the ice was breaking at last, and that this was the answer to Pickering's twig of olive. Young as he was, he had already been long enough in the office to see that these two men had come to hate each other for no earthly reason; that they were both very able, both very hard-working, both equally necessary to the prosperity of the firm, both men of masterful disposition, but possessing nevertheless very kind and tender hearts; both of them most affectionate husbands and fathers, both good and true men. He had seen, too, that the fact of Mr. Pickering having taken so kindly to him had deeply touched his own father. And if—and if—beyond all this Violet could ever like him enough to—well, in fact, to like him very much indeed, might not that be the blessed means of bringing about reconciliation, to say nothing of his being thereby also made the happiest young man on the face of the earth. Every accepted lover tells himself, and also tells the young woman who has accepted him that he is the happiest man in the world, and yet there can only be one person who is actually *the* happiest man living. Can you reconcile the contradiction, dear reader? I can't for the life of me, and yet I have said the same thing myself, and meant it too, and I will be sworn that you have said it once at least, though whether you also meant it is not for me to say.

All this passed through Hubert's mind on receiving his father's message for Mr. Pickering ; but he pulled up with the sudden remembrance that Violet had only seen him twice, and he thought that after all she might not like him very much—not as much as he wanted by yards—and then there was that military brute's portrait, which might mean horrible things, and altogether that he was galloping too fast. So he had a cold fit for a short time, till he fixed his thoughts on next Thursday evening, and then the good steed Hope was off again.

I must not weary the reader by describing too minutely the stages of Hubert's progress in the good books of Mr. and Mrs. Pickering. He dined at their house, he called there, he went about with them, he even induced them once, though not till after much persuasion, to have a little dinner with him at a restaurant and go to the theatre afterwards as his guests, and spent a perceptible slice of his quarter's allowance in the entertainment, and thought it cheap at that. Violet was of the party, I might mention, and when the expenses were weighed in the scales against her presence, she, if I may say so, went down with a bump on one side and up went the paltry money on the other.

Neither must I tell—and indeed the shades were too delicate for any pen to record them—how Hubert crept into Violet's little fluttering heart until he filled her thoughts, her hopes, her life. Nothing had been said, but the Pickerings saw what was coming now. The Debenhams saw it also. Both families would indeed have been purblind otherwise. The ice of years was cracking in all directions, and each one waited nervously for some decisive moment.

It came from Hubert. He told his father—what was indeed superfluous information—that his affections were fixed unalterably on Violet Pickering, and asked whether, if Mr. Pickering's consent were obtained, and if he found that Violet (as he blushingly said he thought possible) cared for him, the wish of his heart might be granted so far as his own father was concerned.

Mr. Debenham was behind his last refuge. One by one his defences had been captured by the forces of kindness, love, and charity that had been fighting against him of late, and this really was the very last stand. “You see, Hubert, my boy, much as I have your happiness at heart there is a great difficulty in the way. Your being on friendly terms with the Pickerings is one thing, and even that, as you know, was not an easy matter for me to accept. But as it is impossible—I fear quite impossible—for my partner and myself ever to be on friendly terms——”

“Is it, father?” broke in Hubert impetuously; “is it impossible? He doesn't really know what you are, father, and, forgive me for saying it, but you don't, indeed, indeed you don't really know him. If you only did know each other it might be so different.”

A troubled look came into Mr. Debenham's face. He felt very much as if he were on trial before his own son and not coming out gloriously. But he hung on.

“I quite understand your feeling about my partner, Hubert, and I don't wish to alter it in the least. I can see that in every way it is for your good that he should be on good terms with you, and I gladly recognise his kindness to you. But what I was going to say was that, although that was all quite right, a marriage between mem-

bers of the two families would under the circumstances be very—well, in fact, can't you see how awkward it would be? Pickering and I would have to pretend to be grinning at each other on the wedding-day, and your mother would be obliged to speak to Mrs. Pickering, and—and—other things too."

The finish was distinctly lame and half-hearted. Hubert, who did not see the least awkwardness about it, battered away for all he was worth, as the youth of the present day are wont to express it, at the failing resistance of his father. And then Mr. Debenham found a brilliant way of escape from a position that was opposed to his great affection for his son, to his instinctive sense of what was the true and right thing to do, and to his secret inner consciousness that he did not now really hate Pickering a bit.

"Hubert, I am most anxious to do anything in my power to make my children happy, and it hurts me to oppose you in this matter. It is impossible for you to enter into my feelings, but it is too much, indeed it is, to ask my consent to your speaking to Mr. Pickering. But if you were to speak to him all the same, and he said 'Yes,' and then his daughter said 'Yes,' and then you came and asked me, well, I don't know what I might say." With which triumphant vindication of his own consistency Debenham was so pleased that he smiled all over his face.

Hubert tried not to smile, but he couldn't help it, because he was so exceedingly delighted, so he smiled too and then he laughed, and his father laughed, until between them they would have made the welkin ring if there had been any welkin in those parts.

Then came the interview with Mr. Pickering.

“I have come to tell you something, Mr. Pickering, that I hope won’t make you very angry with me. I loved your daughter from the first moment I saw her, and I have gone on loving her most awfully ever since, and I have come to ask you to let me ask her if she will care for me too.”

“You haven’t said anything to her, Debenham?” interposed Pickering a little sharply.

“No, sir. Not a word, on my honour.”

“And you have no idea whether she is aware of your feelings, or whether she returns them.” There was a suspicion of a smile round Mr. Pickering’s mouth at this point.

“I think, sir, she must know about me without my telling her, but I dare hardly hope that she feels as I do, though she might in time if I go on loving her as I always shall.”

“And your father?”

“I have told him, sir, and he knew I was going to speak to you.”

“Did he object?”

“He—he didn’t object, but I think he was afraid you might.”

“So I do.”

The room swam round Hubert. Could he have heard aright?

“Did you hear me, Debenham? I say I do object very strongly.”

“Do you mean it, Mr. Pickering,” faltered out the unhappy lad.

“Certainly. Put yourself in my place. I am the doating father of my only child, and all her life her mother and

I have been everything to her in the world and she to us. Then you come along with your blue eyes, curly hair, and taking ways, and coolly ask me to let you walk off with our treasure under our very noses. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, but I know you are not, and that is the worst part of it all."

The room had become stationary again during this speech, and at the end of it Mr. Pickering held out one hand and putting the other very kindly on Hubert's shoulder, he went on after a moment's pause:—

"I was but jesting, my lad. No, that is not quite true, Debenham, for it is hard for parents when the only child goes out from the nest, to return to it often perhaps afterwards but never in the same way, never with the same feeling that it is home, the place where every interest is centred, and where the anxious love and care of parents mean everything to the child. But these changes in life have to be faced, and you have not taken me quite unprepared, because I have seen this coming, and if it were not to be you I suppose it would be some other marauder. You know I like you, Hubert"—he called him by his Christian name for the first time, and the young man flushed with pleasure to hear him say it—"and I believe you would make a good husband to my child, who is very dear to me, and you have my full permission to speak to her. Mind, I don't answer for what she may say, whatever I may guess. Let's see, to-morrow is Saturday. I am going out for the afternoon with my wife, but I should not wonder if you were to find Violet at home if you called."

Mr. Pickering confided to his wife that evening the state of affairs, for which indeed she was fully prepared, but

nothing, of course, was said to Violet, though by a common impulse they both made much of her—that is, even more than usual, if possible, and when her father looked at her he sometimes found it difficult to repress a sigh. And when Saturday afternoon came and the parents were about to start on their expedition (which was quite a genuine engagement), Mr. Pickering said to Violet, with an air of carelessness that he considered a masterpiece, but which was, in fact, the most transparent piece of play-acting, and would not have deceived even a marine: “I rather think Hubert Debenham is coming in this afternoon, Violet, and he may get here before we return. You might just stop in and give him a cup of tea if you have nothing particular to go out for.”

Violet blushed, and her poor little heart beat quickly, and she became so confused that she was obliged to look anywhere except at her father as she answered in a low voice, “Very well, papa.”

And when Hubert came later she rang for the tea almost before he was inside the room, and talked very fast about being so sorry that her father and mother were out, and poor blundering Hubert, thinking to come to the rescue, blurted out before he realised what he was saying, “Don’t mention it please, your father told me they would be out,” which made poor Violet more confused than ever.

The advent of tea was in one sense a relief and in another sense an irritation, to Hubert at all events, for a man cannot propose marriage to the woman he loves when a servant keeps bothering in and out with the tea-kettle, and the hot water and muffins, and all the rest of the adjuncts of that effeminate meal. And when the

servant had finally departed, Violet had to make believe to be fearfully busy over the tea-table, and talked rather at random about every and any subject except the one that was making her heart beat, and painting her cheeks the colour of the reddest of roses, and causing her little hands to tremble so that she could hardly hand a cup to Hubert.

But he could wait no longer for his fate. He came and sat close beside her, and called her Violet for the first time, and told her of his great love and the hope he had dared to cherish that she might care for him, and that whether she cared for him or not he should always love her dearly—always—but he hoped, oh! he hoped that she might love him. And he said too, that her parents and his parents knew of what he felt for her, but that he did not say that to influence her in the very least, but only to show that he had not done anything dishonourable or unfair to her in telling her what was in his heart.

Her tears had begun falling fast before he had finished, and when she turned her head away and buried her face in her hands, fear came upon him, but after a few moments she took one of her hands from her face and held it timidly towards him, and when he seized it, and then, holding it still, drew her towards him, nearer, nearer, till her shapely young head was nestled on his breast—when he did that there was no resistance, and from that shelter, where he could not see her sweet face, the modest blushing confession came, that she had loved him from the first and he was all the world to her, and that she could not help crying because the joy of knowing that he loved her was more than she could bear.

“Sanderson, will you please say to Mr. Pickering that, if perfectly convenient to him, I should like to come into his room and have a word with him.” As Mr. Debenham said this he turned his head away and appeared indisposed to meet Sanderson’s eyes, which opened very wide with astonishment, though he had been slightly prepared by recent wonders for more to come. He departed on the errand and came back in less than a minute. “Mr. Pickering’s compliments, and he’ll be happy to see you, but if it will save you trouble he will come in to you.”

“Certainly not—I won’t allow him.” Suiting the action to the word, Debenham got up hurriedly and went to his partner’s room. Pickering immediately rose, and they stood face to face, those two clever, shrewd, experienced lawyers, and high-minded men, who in every relation of life had acquitted themselves well and honourably, and yet had exhibited towards each other, during all these years, the most bitter enmity, and denied to each other the possession of one redeeming virtue.

And then a strange thing happened. Debenham held out his hand and Pickering shook it heartily. And then Debenham hurried out of the room. Not a single word was said on either side, and I don’t fancy that either of them would have been able to speak if he had tried. But there was a world of meaning in that handshake. It meant that each of them acknowledged that during all those years—never alas to be recalled!—he had misjudged and mistrusted the other, and allowed jealousy and wrath to be nursed in his breast until it had become a ruthless tyrant there, dominating his whole life and poisoning every healthy thought and feeling so far as his partner was con-

cerned. It meant that their eyes had been opened to their past folly and wickedness through the new love that had risen up in the next generation bringing healing in its wings. It meant that in future they would be fast friends. It meant all that, and it brought to each of them a joyful heart.

Sanderson's duties from that time were strictly limited to those of cashier, and he retired from the diplomatic service in which he had so greatly distinguished himself.

BOBBIE JEFFRIES, BARRISTER-AT-LAW

ROBERT JEFFRIES, known to all and sundry as Bobbie Jeffries, was a full-blown member of the Bar of England. He had a wig and a tin canister of the approved type to keep it in, a gown, and a bag with his initials on it that might have contained collars and other articles about to start on their way to the wash, but, as a matter of fact, very seldom contained anything at all. He also had Chambers in the Temple and a fifth part of a clerk. Concerning the Chambers I may remark that although, according to custom, I use the plural it was, strictly speaking, one room of small dimensions, and two other barristers like unto himself had the privilege of using it. They very seldom availed themselves of it, however, for one of them played in his county cricket eleven in the summer (under an assumed name, but that did not alter the fact that he played, though he seemed to think that it did somehow), and was much taken up with other sporting duties in the winter, while the other was fond of travel and not at all fond of law. His fifth part of a clerk was not an aliquot proportion of the clerk's body, but, to use an expression dear to lawyers, "one equal undivided fifth part or share of and in" the clerk's time and services. The services rendered in Bobbie's case mainly took the form of going to buy his usual quantity of tobacco, for I have to confess

that his practice was infinitesimal, and his time eked out by reporting law cases for some of the daily papers, doing a little devilling for other barristers, preparing indices and tables of cases for law books, and such-like odd jobs ; and the advent of a brief, even if only marked on the back in the laconic language of the Temple, "three and one," signifying a fee of three guineas for his services in Court, with an extra one for conferring with him before the case came on, was as rare as it was welcome. Indeed, if any one who knew him had been suddenly asked how Bobbie Jeffries got along, he would have been puzzled to say. But he did get along, and he always dressed and looked like a gentleman ; he was never known to borrow money from Jew or Gentile, and nobody ever heard of his being in debt to anybody for anything.

If he had not been able somehow to get along, he would have stuck in very deep mud. For his father had died just when Bobbie was called to the bar, leaving a widow and several children, of whom Bobbie was the eldest, very slenderly provided for. He had made a large professional income but had spent it, and, what was worse, had allowed his wife and children to suppose that he was rich, and he had provided lavishly for them and himself every luxury. In Bobbie's case this had taken the form of indulging in all kinds of outdoor sport. How such men as Mr. Jeffries sleep at night I cannot imagine. Perhaps they don't. When he died a very different and wholly unexpected state of things had to be faced. The younger children were all at educational stages, and Bobbie's mother, who was a brave and sensible little woman, had quite as much as she could manage to do to keep her own head and the other

young heads above water. So Bobbie made up his mind at once that, come what might, he would be no tax upon her, and he never was. Indeed, he had more than once, goodness knows how, managed to send a remittance to his mother, who, when his father died, made her home at a provincial town where schools were good and cheap, and people were not rich and did not pretend to be.

Without any fuss Bobbie had quietly dropped the various sports that his soul loved and in which he greatly excelled, and one inexpensive golf club represented the sum total of all his extravagance in that way. Most of his friends knew or guessed the reason, and all of them respected and liked him the more. Indeed, nobody could help liking Bobbie, with his bright face and merry laugh and quaint way of saying things. He was the Mark Tapley of the Temple to all who knew him, and the clerk of whom he had only a fifth share would have walked barefooted to the extreme end of the Old Kent Road (which is, I believe, the largest measured distance from the Temple known to man), if it would have served him. Perhaps there was a bit of a reason for that too, not known to any one else in the Chambers or out of them—a little word of manly straight advice given at a critical moment when the glamour of the sporting tipsters' certainties had led the youth into betting on horse races with money that he could not afford to lose; a sovereign lent (and faithfully paid back) to replace money given to him for another purpose and used to pay his losings. Such things were not what Bobbie ever talked about. He just did them.

I should like much to be able to say that Bobbie Jeffries was a genius; that he needed only the oppor-

tunity sure to come to him who waits to start fairly on the race to fame and fortune; that he was of the stamp of man who rises to the highest honours at the Bar and on the Bench, and when he went to bed dreamt of the Wool-sack. But I am nothing if not truthful and I cannot say it. At school he had never managed to do more than scrape along from one form to another when superannuation otherwise loomed imminent. It was even said that he did escape superannuation once because he was such a good bat, and the school could not afford to lose him. At Oxford another series of scrapings began, and when it came to taking his degree he only contrived to secure a "Pass" with the utmost difficulty, and, it was again said, not without some indulgence, granted this time because he was such a popular fellow, and his influence in his College had been always on the right side. Lastly, his Bar examinations had been a sore trial to him, and more than one fence had had to be taken a second time before he could get over it.

If he had not been very industrious in his father's lifetime, it was largely due to the foolish indulgence and extravagance which had caused the latter to bring up his children on false pretences. No one could charge Bobbie with idleness since then, but no one, not even his dearest friends, could say that he was clever. His prospects were therefore not brilliant from any point of view.

His Chambers I have said were in the Temple. His abode was at No. 51 Cranley Street, Bloomsbury, where he had two rooms on the third floor of one of the many lodging-houses in that quarter. When he was asked by a friend why on earth he lived in that forsaken part of

London, he replied laconically but cheerfully, "cheap," and when he was then asked how he liked it, he said, "nasty." But he did not say "nasty" in a nasty way, but rather as though he had been led into a witticism, and he added immediately, "not half bad though. Come and look me up, and mind you don't fall over anything on the stairs. Maria, the servant, whom I love and who loves me, is always preparing new forms of obstacle races with no prizes for the winner but a barked shin."

To the landlady of No. 51, a widow, Bobbie was a terror and a delight. He was a terror because he "did things" that reduced her to despair, his enormities principally taking the form of bringing unexpected friends into his rooms at impossible culinary hours, and then descending on Mrs. Davies with a request for chops and baked potatoes, followed by toasted cheese, or some other form of bachelor repast suited to the combination of a healthy appetite and a slender purse, but nevertheless involving the need of a kitchen fire and cooking. These requests would be made like a sort of charge of cavalry, for Bobbie did not hesitate to go down to the basement (which no other lodger had ever been known to invade), and pour out such a torrent of blandishments and outrageous flattery to Mrs. Davies that she did not know whether to box his ears or kiss him as if he were her son. He would tell her with a shameless countenance that he had brought his two friends in so that they might know for once in their lives what chops and toasted cheese really meant. He had told them, he said, that there were no chops like hers, no toasted cheese like hers, no such cook in all London, let alone Bloomsbury, as she was. She couldn't, she wouldn't break

their hearts and humiliate him by refusing him this one request, though he knew the fire had been let down and the kitchen tidied. Such interviews ended always by her saying, "There, Mr. Bobbie Jeffries" (she had caught the infection because his friends always inquired for him at the door by that name), "get along with you out of my kitchen, do, or I shall never get them done," and as he vanished with a laugh that made the very pots and pans smile in sympathy, Mrs. Davies would add, "Bless him—trouble's no trouble when it pleases him." She, too, had a little secret cupboard of memory, and in her case it was a memory about a landlord and a threatened distress for rent and breaking up of her home, and of Bobbie coming to the rescue as if it were a matter of course. He was minus his watch and chain for several weeks after that occurred, and when she noticed it she said nothing, because she knew he would not like it, but she had not been a lodging-house keeper in Bloomsbury for years without knowing what that meant, and she went away and had a good cry, and through her tears sobbed out a widow's prayer that God would bless him for his unselfish goodness to her.

As for Maria, the general servant, who was parcelled out among the lodgers very much as the clerk of whom Bobbie claimed a fifth was divided between several masters, but did not have nearly such a good time, she also was a worshipper of Bobbie, and would do anything in the world for him. He gave her as little trouble as he could, because he knew she had a hard life of it, but when he did anything for himself that she could have done for him she was quite vexed, and would scold him like a naughty child. "I 'spose I 'aven't got 'ands then, Mr. Bobbie Jeffries" (she

had caught that too), "that you must go and clean your brown shoes yourself, or p'raps you think I don't polish 'em proper. If I couldn't polish a pair of brown shoes I should think it about time I went into the work'us, I should, and wot do you go comin' down all them stairs for to arst for things at the top of the kitchen stairs? ain't there a bell, I should like to know, or arn't I quick enough to answer when you ring it? Why don't you make your bed, and wash up the things, and dust the room if you wants to do everything yourself and not let any one else 'ave a chance? I should."

After such an oration as that Bobbie would generally retaliate by throwing the tea-cosy so that it lighted in the small of Maria's back as she was leaving the room, and indeed this or a similar compliment she always expected and received on such occasions. As she went downstairs she would be heard to say to herself, "I could work my bones off for 'im, that I could." It was also one of her favourite confidences to the baker's man, with whom she walked out on Sundays, that if it wasn't for "our third floor" she would not stay in the place another month though asked on bended knees. This made the baker's man a little jealous of the third floor, but Maria enjoyed that as lending an importance and zest to his courtship that it otherwise rather lacked.

It happened that the first floor rooms and a bedroom on the second floor had been vacant for some time at a certain period, and Mrs. Davies' barometer had been falling in consequence towards wet weather, otherwise tears, and she had in fact shed a few on Bobbie's table one evening as she stood by it telling her woes to him. He cheered her up

as he always did, insomuch that she said when she went downstairs that that Mr. Bobbie Jeffries, bless him, was as good as any medicine. But just when things were looking very bad, and she was vainly trying to make twice two work out at six, a middle-aged gentleman, whose name turned out to be Murray, accompanied by a remarkably pretty girl, obviously his daughter, came and took the vacant rooms. He had just come to London from abroad, and put up at an hotel, and not liking the noise and ceremony of hotel life, and having heard that Bloomsbury was a quiet part of London (which it certainly is, whatever may be said about it by sneering West-Enders), had looked about there. He saw Mrs. Davies' card in the window (Bobbie called it her mourning card, but she never saw the subtle joke), and liking the look of the rooms and the landlady—she was a good-tempered, comfortable-looking woman was Mrs. Davies, and might have been an angel if she had not been driven to keep lodgings—he took them. He did not even ask how much the weekly rent was, and when Mrs. Davies told him the figure he merely said, “All right,” which, as she said afterwards, took her breath away, being so very unlike the ordinary run of the Bloomsbury lodger.

This important event was duly communicated to Bobbie, both by Mrs. Davies and Maria, but except for his sympathy with the struggling widow it did not interest him very keenly at first, because lodgers came and went and made no odds to him as long as they did not attempt to use a piano in the first floor sitting-room, which he told Mrs. Davies must have come out of the Ark and got damp there.

It will be observed that in the above paragraph I have used the words “at first.” They did not slip in by accident,

they were not put in for padding, but carried a deep meaning. Bobbie met the daughter on the stairs one day, and from that moment he was very much interested in the new lodgers, so much, in fact, that for a time he seemed to be always going up or down the stairs for no very obvious reason, unless it were in the hope of meeting the daughter again. Then one evening as he came in he met the father going out, and gave him a pleasant "good evening." The lodger returned it civilly enough and looked him over, not rudely but with a freedom that would have been embarrassing to most people, though it did not disturb the equanimity of Bobbie Jeffries. The truth was that Mrs. Davies and also Maria had been singing Bobbie's praises to the daughter, and the daughter told the father, and the father was disposed to be interested in the young man. He liked the look of him and told his daughter so.

Now Bobbie Jeffries was not at all the sort of young man to sigh on the stairs, and look out of his window and tell the stars what a beautiful and sweet-looking girl was lodging on the first floor, and what he would give (if he had it) to know her. Not a bit of it. He sent a message by Maria to say that if the loan of any of his books would be agreeable to Mr. Murray or his daughter, he begged that they would look over them and take any they cared to read. To this he received a suitable answer, and the very next evening Mr. Murray knocked at his door, and when he came in told him that he had taken him at his word, and would be very pleased to look over his books as he kindly offered. Bobbie, who was smoking like a river steamer at the time, hoped Mr. Murray did not mind it.

"Mind it," he answered, "I'm dying for a pipe myself,

but the truth is that I don't like to smoke my daughter out with only one sitting-room between us, and so I don't indulge in the house."

"Well," said Bobbie, "that's easily cured. In the first place light up now, and in the second place come up to my room and smoke whether I'm here or not whenever you please." He pushed the tobacco and a pipe towards Mr. Murray, but that old campaigner speedily extracted a pipe from one pocket and a pouch of tobacco from another.

"That's heartily kind of you," he answered, evidently much pleased. "It's more like the colonies where I came from than the colder English ways I have seen since I arrived on this side. What's your name, if I may ask? I did catch a sort of double name from the servant who brought your message, but could not make out what she said except that it was Mr. Bobbie Something."

Bobbie laughed.

"That's like Maria's cheek. The fact is that my name is Jeffries, but Robert is my Christian name, and friends who have no respect for me call me Bobbie Jeffries. It's got to be so common that one name is hardly ever applied to me without the other, and from hearing it on the doorstep by people asking for me, and in this room when they come in, Mrs. Davies and Maria have caught the trick. I don't mind if they like it, and I am so used to it that I don't even notice it."

They were soon smoking and talking in the greatest amity, and questioning each other without any reserve or fencing on either side. Bobbie would have liked the daughter to be there, but he could not have everything all at once, as he said to himself, and he had not made a bad start.

He learnt that Mr. Murray was of English birth, but had made his home in New South Wales, whither he had gone very early in life to seek his fortune as a sheep farmer. He did not say whether he had found it, not being at all addicted evidently to tall talking. He was a widower, and his elder children had married, and Rose—the one with him here—was his youngest child. She had been sent to England to finish her education, and he had come over for the double purpose of fetching her home and again seeing something of this and other European countries. They had had a prolonged tour on the Continent, and had now returned to London, where he wished to spend a few months quietly before going back home. He had no near relatives now living in England, and no friends here except a few Colonials whom he ran against from time to time. Rose was evidently the apple of his eye, and, as Bobbie said to himself, well she might be. Such briefly was his story, told simply and unreservedly between the intervals permitted by his pipe.

Bobbie told Mr. Murray his own story, except that he covered over his father's folly (though Mr. Murray, who was a very shrewd man, saw through that easily enough), and spoke of himself with great modesty. Mr. Murray eyed him narrowly, for he was a close observer of character.

It was a pleasant evening to both, and when Mr. Murray met his daughter at breakfast next morning (she had gone to bed a good long time before he had left Bobbie's rooms) he told her about it, and said he liked the young man very much.

An agreeable acquaintance struck up by people living

in the same house does not usually take long to become intimate. Bobbie was soon free of the Murrays' sitting-room, where smoking was not allowed, and Mr. Murray frequented Bobbie's room, where it was not only allowed but almost necessary in self-defence. Rose proved to be as delightful as she looked—full of spirits but never vulgar, affectionate to her father, easily pleased, interested in everything. When Bobbie gave a state banquet in his room in her honour she was as delighted as if she had been asked to dine at Buckingham Palace. Maria let the green peas fall all over the floor, handed round the sweet sauce with the fish, because she thought it looked like butter, and performed other feats that were not in the programme; but these incidents only created innocent merriment, and Bobbie and Rose laughed till the room almost cracked its sides in sympathy. One side, by the way, was cracked already, for it was an old house. And when Bobbie described to them how he had persuaded Mrs. Davies to cook the special dinner for him by means of a visit to the kitchen, in the course of which he was afraid he had put his arm round her ample waist to back up his petition, and after offering to butter the saucepans, shell the peas, and peel the potatoes himself, had finally been driven out with the warming-pan, even Mr. Murray, who was a quiet, undemonstrative man, joined in the laughter till the tears ran down his face, and he had to tell Bobbie to stop. Then after dinner Rose allowed her father to smoke by special permission, but Bobbie himself would not light a pipe on any persuasion. And he showed her photographs of his mother and his younger brothers and sisters, and of himself at Oxford as one of a cricket

eleven, as one of a rowing eight (one taken in the boat and one out of it), as one of a group having no particular significance, and merely illustrating the undergraduate passion for being photographed somehow or other, as one of a select dining-club, with a special coat and buttons of its own, and others again of himself alone in divers costumes and attitudes. She looked longest at them, and said which she thought were good, and he apologised for the profusion by saying with his infectious cheeriness that those were his extravagant days, and that one taken every ten years on the pavement in the Tottenham Court Road, on specially cheap terms, would quite satisfy him now. That was a great evening, and the Roman Emperor (was it a Roman Emperor?—never mind, it was some very large man), who lamented that he had lost a day, would not have cared fourpence for that if it had finished up with such an evening as Bobbie had. In fact, he would never have made the priggish remark at all.

But that was only a special sample of an extra superfine treat, for there were other good times I promise you. Bobbie took Mr. Murray and Rose to the Temple one Sunday morning and showed them all round, and conducted them to the service in the beautiful old church, and afterwards to his own chambers. They seemed to think more of the church than the chambers, and Mr. Murray hazarded the remark that Bobbie did not appear to have much room to turn round in, while Rose murmured even something that sounded very like "what a shame," when she saw the very small space that Bobbie claimed for his own, and the Spartan nature of the arrangements generally.

"Do tell me what's in that biscuit-box?" she asked presently.

"My wig."

"Your what?" She looked quite scared, and her glance went instantly to his curly brown hair.

He kept her in suspense for a minute while he told a few transparent fibs, and then he brought out the wig and hitched his gown off a peg, and put them both on for the edification of Rose and her father.

"A custom so ancient that I don't personally remember its being established," said Bobbie, "ordains that I have to put on this wig and gown when I address the Court, which opportunity does not occur so frequently as my soul could desire or my merits justify. In fact, I may say about once a quarter."

She said impetuously that it seemed wicked to put that coarse, bobbly, white thing over such a good head of hair, and then it suddenly struck her that the remark was forward, not to say bold, and she coloured up and began to talk hard about something else.

It was delightful to see her peeping and peering about. Bobbie took them into one room in the Chambers, which was occupied by a barrister in really large practice, and pointed to the row of briefs on his table, and, with a little sigh, at the fees noted on them. "He does make piles of money, I can tell you," he remarked, with the awe that even the most impudent young barrister has for his seniors in large practice.

"Why don't people send these things to you as well?" said Rose, with a touch of indignation on his account that was balm to his soul.

"Well, the real fact is," he replied, "that for one thing I have no influence to back me except that a few old college friends put a brief in my way now and then and chance my ruining the case. And another thing is that Blazer is tremendously clever, and I don't mind telling you that I am not."

The Chambers next day seemed a different place to Bobbie, and if you can't guess why, reader, I am not going to tell you, and that is all about it.

The friendship thus begun soon ripened to something warmer between these two young people. There came to each of them the indefinable sense that the presence of the other was necessary for happiness. There came the discovery that thoughts kept flying in one direction to the exclusion of all others. There came the look in his eyes that meant worlds to her, and the drooping of hers when he sought them, the lingering touch when the hands met, the few words that were spoken if they happened to be alone, and the unaccountable shyness with which they were said. They loved each other with all the strength of their young hearts, and though no word of love had yet been spoken, each half guessed the secret of the other, and half dared to hope that the half guess was right.

There had been no reflection on Bobbie's side as to whither all this was tending, and whether he was justified in winning Rose's love when he was making an income barely large enough to keep himself with the strictest economy and leave a little over for his poor mother, and might have to wait years for better days if they ever came at all. That view of the subject had yet to come, and it came in the Temple one day.

It happened that the two friends who nominally shared his Chambers both looked in that day to see how Bobbie was getting on, but not with the remotest idea of getting on themselves so far as the practice of the Law was concerned. One of them sat on his table, and the other adjusted a chair so that he could just reach the mantelpiece with his feet. The three compared notes (only Bobbie's notes were not so full as usual, for the one subject of entralling interest to him was too sacred to be talked about), and then spoke of mutual friends.

"I say, Bobbie Jeffries, have you heard that Wood, who used to row three in our eight, has got engaged to be married?"

"No, indeed, I didn't. Who's the girl?"

"She's a Miss Lucas, a parson's daughter, and, therefore, one of, at least, seven, I believe. I don't know what you think, but I call it an infernal shame myself."

"Why?" asked Bobbie.

"Why, indeed! Just think. Wood has no money, or influence, or anything else. He has taken up school-mastering, because it was the only thing to be done; but he will never make his fortune out of that, for he only took a Pass in Greats, and he can't hope to be more than an assistant-master on a small screw. If he had capital he might possibly—only possibly mind—succeed by going a buster, and taking a big house at which to receive little boys and give 'em all the comforts of home, with his wife at hand to bath 'em and cut their nails. But he hasn't got even that chance. A nice fellow to go and engage himself to a poor girl, who will either have to wait till doomsday or marry him on nothing, and then they'll come to be like

poor old Tom Whistler—you remember him at Exeter—and his wife, who live on I'm blest if I know what, and look like it! I call it beastly selfishness myself."

Bobbie did not hear much more of the conversation, for he suddenly remembered an engagement and went out.

"Bobbie Jeffries ain't quite so chirpy as usual. If he was anybody in the world but Bobbie Jeffries I should say he was in the blues," said one friend to the other as they shortly afterwards walked off.

Bobbie had no engagement. He wanted to try and stop the hammers that were beating in his brain, to quiet his thumping heart if he could, to reduce to some form and purpose the bewildering tumult of thought that was surging within him. Had he been acting the part of a selfish brute towards Rose Murray? What had he to offer her? What hope, what prospect, what end could there be to any engagement between them if he were to ask her to pledge her future life to him? Did not the words of his friend that were ringing in his ears apply exactly, literally, without a shadow of difference to him? And her father, too, who loved her and had trusted him, how could he meet him as an honourable man when he had stolen Rose's heart perhaps already, and for what?—to offer her to share penury with him, or wait and wait until her young life drooped and faded with the weariness of hope deferred. What mischief had he not done already in yielding thus heedlessly, blindly, to the promptings of love, that he should have stifled and denied himself at all costs.

At last he grew a little calmer, and he determined that he would at least act honestly now that he suddenly saw in its true light what manner of thing it was that he had been

doing all these joyous weeks in which Rose had taken possession of his very being. What he meant to do would, he felt sure, be painful to her, but he told himself that it was better, far better, for her future than to seek to tie her to him in life-long poverty.

Mr. Murray generally came up to Bobbie's room for a smoke after dinner in the evening, and then, when there was no other engagement, they would both go down and spend the rest of the evening with Rose. How Bobbie's heart beat as he heard Mr. Murray's step on this particular evening, for he was going to confess everything to him.

When the pipes were lighted up and they settled in their accustomed chairs, Bobbie began his confession. He had been so transparently simple and straightforward all his life that the consciousness of having betrayed this good man's confidence, and the despairing magnitude of the reparation he felt called upon to make, almost overpowered him, and Mr. Murray, who was an observant man, saw there was something amiss.

"What's the matter, Bobbie Jeffries?" He had got hold of the name now. Every one did.

"Well, Mr. Murray, the fact is," Bobbie began slowly, but pulled himself together like a man as he went on, "I wanted to tell you that I've been acting like a mean, despicable traitor to you and your daughter."

Mr. Murray's eyes opened very wide, and he looked searchingly at Bobbie, who went on: "Without realising what it meant—it doesn't make me any better, but I declare most solemnly to you that I did not realise it—I have allowed myself to love your daughter truly and dearly, but,

as I see now, blindly and wrongly, and, what is far worse, I fear that she—that she has grown a little fond of me too. I had no right to do this, Mr. Murray, because I am poor, and have no prospects, no future to offer to her, and it has been a shameful act, for which I beg your forgiveness. Of course, I will leave here at once, and you will make some excuse so that she may not know the reason why I did not—say—good-bye, and she will soon forget me of course. I know too well that you must always think very badly of me, and I make no excuse for myself, but do, do try to believe that I did not mean to do harm, for I love your daughter far too dearly.

Mr. Murray looked at him oddly, and then his face grew grim and stern.

“Well, sir, this is a nice business indeed. Pray, have you told my daughter behind my back of your feelings towards her?”

“On my word of honour, no.

“But you have just fallen in love with her all the same.”

“Yes, Mr. Murray, I have.”

“And you think she has fallen in love with you?”

“I dare not say that—for her dear sake I hope not—but—but I am afraid our feelings may be mutual.”

Mr. Murray rose very deliberately, and Bobbie knew that an awful moment had come. For the first time in his life he was afraid to meet another man’s eye, and was feeling like a criminal about to receive sentence.

“I am amazed at what you have told me, Bobbie Jeffries, and find it difficult to express my indignation at your conduct. I find it so difficult that there is only one thing, sir, that I have to say to you, and I hope that you’ll

remember my words to the end of your life. What I have to say, sir, is—*GO IN AND WIN.*"

Bobbie sprang up with a bound—but before he could speak Mr. Murray put up his hand and added: "But on one inflexible condition, which is, that you give up the Bar, which, judging from what I have seen so far, need not be a heart-breaking wrench, for your chances don't appear to amount to shucks, and come out with me and be my partner. I am what folks reckon to be a rich man, and I am getting on in years, and I want young blood, and what's more, Bobbie Jeffries, you're the one man I've wanted ever since I set eyes on you, and if my daughter don't have you I'll lock her up."

He held his hand out and Bobbie gripped it, but he could only utter a few broken words of thanks. His heart was just too full.

"We've been longer than usual, and Rose will be expecting us downstairs," said Mr. Murray drily, "suppose you go down and fetch her up here instead. You needn't hurry, as I'm only half through this pipe."

Bobbie did not need a second hint, and was out of the room in a brace of shakes. When he returned, not very long afterwards, but quite long enough for Mr. Murray to have finished his pipe, Rose was with him, blushing like her own sweet name, and he was holding her hand as they entered. Maria said afterwards in the kitchen, that just as they went upstairs, she herself was a-comin' out of the ground floor front, and she see'd Mr. Bobbie Jeffries put his arm round Miss Murray's waist and kiss her, you might knock her (meaning Maria) down if she didn't. Nobody knocked her down and there is no reason to

suggest that she told an untruth, but then why, when they came into the room, was he only holding Rose's hand? I can't imagine, unless it be the fact, which I should indeed be sorry to believe, that lovers are not straightforward, and do things behind your back that they would not do before your face.

Rose went up to her father and kissed him. He looked interrogatively at the beaming young man, who nodded back "yes." Which meant that Bobbie Jeffries had gone in and won.

THE POOR MAN'S CASTLE

THERE are, I am sure, a surprisingly large number of families among the poorer classes who cherish a tradition of some great act of wrong done to them several generations ago, whereby they have been deprived of vast estates which by right belong to them and which would be theirs now, "if things was as they ought to be." It is humorous, and at the same time not without pathos, to see how faded and tattered copies of bits of wills, and hopelessly inconsequent extracts from deeds, are cherished in all sorts of odd receptacles, ranging from empty flower-pots to unlocked table-drawers, and are usually tied up in an outer covering of newspaper, as sacred and conclusive evidence of claims that not all the efforts of all the lawyers in the profession could possibly bring to life now, if they ever existed at all. It would indeed be too pathetic to be at all humorous if these traditions and papers caused any real distress or unhappiness in the family circle, but my own belief is that they do not. On the contrary, I think that in most cases they are distinctly comforting, and serve to cast the halo of a perfectly innocent and harmless delusion over otherwise sordid and unsatisfactory surroundings. They create on a different social plane the same feeling that causes a sea-side lodging-house keeper to tell you, before you can get out of the hall into the elegant apartments that you

propose to engage for self and family, that she is a lady by birth and education, that her late husband was the nephew of a clergyman, and that her grandfather on the maternal side commanded a ship, the sort and size of ship being left to the imagination. This oppressive weight of gentility may not serve to prevent your sherry from melting faster than you can possibly account for by consumption or evaporation, but it is her mainstay and solace, and may, perchance, seem to her to cover a multitude of sins of abstraction, though you perhaps do not see it in that light.

These claims to estates that are now wrongfully possessed by somebody else occasionally break out so far as to reach the point of consulting a lawyer. I do not think that the family who cherish the tradition usually get so far on their own account. What happens generally is, that it is their staple subject of conversation to the parson, or the district visitor, or any other person in a superior social class who may happen to take a kindly interest in the family. Then this person begins to think that there must really be something in it, and looks around to find some young solicitor who has his spurs to win, or some old solicitor known as being a kind-hearted man, and meekly submissive to being sponged upon, or some barrister to whom the subject is artfully introduced at dinner by his wife after much feminine scheming, with a view to eliciting his opinion.

In the days of my youth I have often heard my father assailed on all sides by my mother, who gave her life to the poor of Westminster—Westminster as it was in those days, when it contained slums that would make Whitechapel walk by on the other side and Bethnal Green turn up its nose. She would work round some abstruse pedigree, or

some proposition of law that had been put to her during the day by one of her deserving objects, who had fully persuaded her that a peerage had been usurped by some insignificant branch of his family, and that on every principle of law and equity a coronet ought to adorn his brow. I am afraid that my father's callous indifference had been begotten by much experience of my mother's great faith in others and not very logical perception of hard facts, and at all events I know that when I was old enough to follow the conversation, my father always took refuge in dense ignorance, and was never drawn from his retreat by the most insinuating special pleading. The attack nearly always commenced by stating the case in the abstract, and I give an example.

Supposing that a very rich man died, leaving two sons and three daughters, and the eldest son went away and was never heard of again, and the father gave him up for lost and left the estate to the second son, and the second son died without leaving any children, and two of the daughters never married, but the third daughter married and had a large family, and her eldest son came into the property and died a lunatic, and then her second daughter's eldest boy succeeded, but died when only eighteen, and then somehow the estate got into another family (exact connecting links not known, but dark villainy suspected), who have kept it uninterruptedly for about two hundred years. And suppose that after all the eldest son who went away was not dead at all when he was supposed to be, but became a bushranger in Australia, and had a bushranging family of children from whom (as it was firmly believed on no evidence whatever) John Crump, a cabdriver, of No. 249

Strutton Ground, Westminster, and a very respectable man except on Saturday nights, was a direct descendant, but through what branches or trees there was nothing to show. Supposing all this, was it not clear to the most obtuse and obstinate mind that John Crump was on every principle of justice entitled to that estate? Thus my mother.

“I don’t know,” would be my father’s chilling answer.

“But really if a man is a direct descendant of another man, is he not his heir?”

“I have heard so,” replied my father.

“But, Edward, who else could possibly be the rightful owner?” persisted my mother.

“I should say the people who have got it. They seem to have been there for some time.”

“Oh, no! that is surely impossible. They don’t come through the eldest son at all.” Thus my mother again, who is thinking of the cabman and his seven children, and in the wish of her compassionate heart to see them suddenly raised above all want, would do anything short of telling an untruth to behold them wake up to find the estate theirs, and to leave Westminster in a carriage and pair, with the cabman in the novel position of riding inside.

No answer from my father.

“Well, Edward, I only ask you whether it isn’t a case that ought to be taken up by some one?”

“If by some one you mean me, my dear, I think not, because I don’t know enough law, and besides I am not a solicitor. You must wait till this boy gets into the profession, and he will prove all your Westminster pedigrees, and find estates for all your poor people without the least difficulty.”

I was "this boy," and a very junior articled clerk at the time. Don't think that my father's cynicism was real or unkindly meant. He knew that my mother believed everything that could possibly make anybody else happy, or raise any poor soul above the grinding struggles in the midst of which her saintly life was spent, and to damp her ardent belief in impossible visions for her poor people was, in sober earnest, a painful necessity, because there was reason to fear that her sympathy, never denied to anybody, most innocently encouraged idle hopes in wildly impossible claims.

When I was a little older my mother would turn her battery on to me, and more than once in a back room, devoted to my vespertinal efforts to read law, I held interviews with people who came to unfold the sort of story of which I have given an illustration. I will not deny that at that verdant period of life I occasionally pictured myself rising to fame upon the successful prosecution of dormant rights to titles and estates of great magnitude, while on the more modest platform of matrimonial disputes, claims to custody of children, distresses for rent (plenty of them, alas!) seizure of goods by the bailiff (plenty of bailiffs), and rights of action against all sorts of people for all sorts of things I propounded with great confidence, for the benefit of clients introduced to me by my mother, opinions that I now shudder to recall, and for which I hope I may be forgiven. I grieve to add that the only solid achievement I ever accomplished was to secure the dismissal from my profession of a disreputable solicitor who had received money to settle a claim against a very respectable man in humble circumstances, and had misappropriated the same, with the

result that when all trouble was supposed to be over the bailiffs appeared and sold up the unfortunate victim. I tried first to get the scoundrel to return the money, and paid several visits to a room on a top floor which represented his office. He was usually out and the door locked, with a dirty piece of paper pinned to it, indicating that he would return presently, and when I did run him to earth he declared, I believe truly, that he had no money to pay with, and in answer to my indignant rhetoric took refuge in an undoubted fact, which I have often heard asserted since as an original proposition, *viz.*, that it is beyond the reach of any known form of pressure, scientific, legal, or otherwise to extract blood from a stone. I used for some years to see him hanging about the purlieus of the law, but he must long since have ended his dishonoured existence. It was characteristic of my mother that for long afterwards she often asked me wistfully, and with a most unconvincing air of severity, ostentatiously put on to conceal feelings of pity to which she did not dare to confess, whether I ever heard anything about that "unhappy man."

I feel that I have digressed, but I could not bring myself to hide under a bushel the one and only result of my "parleyings with certain people," as I think Robert Browning has it, as the youthful adviser of my mother in her efforts to obtain justice, as she saw it, for those who could not afford to pay for that somewhat expensive, not to say dubious and wall-eyed blessing.

When I grew older and busier my mother's consideration would not allow her to tax me heavily, but certain parson friends came on and filled up the vacuum. I know they

meant it kindly, and I am sure they believed they were doing me a good turn and affording me an opportunity of distinguishing myself, to say nothing of the material rewards that would be showered on me if I could for instance establish the title of John Gubbins, then engaged in agricultural labours not unconnected with the spreading of manure, to the earldom of Fitzblitheringay, the lordship of numerous manors, and an estate in Northumberland producing, as it was confidently believed, at least £40,000 a year. I must not weary the beloved reader with too much illustration, but if I die for it, or my reader does (which latter event I should if possible regard as a worse calamity to the nation), I cannot forbear to describe one incident of this kind that occurred to me. I will only observe by way of preface that it took place at a period of my life when I may go so far as to say that time had become valuable to me.

When immersed one day in occupations that I trust were useful, declare to have been honest, and hope were not altogether devoid of remuneration, a clerk entered my room and shut the door behind him. His face wore a peculiar expression that is only seen on the clerkly countenance when respect (by which I mean of course only the outward semblance of respect) is struggling with ill-concealed mirth. He had a note in his hand which I recognised on his giving it to me to be in the writing of a very old friend of mine who was vicar of a parish in Kent. I opened it, and read as follows:—

“ DEAR OLD BOY,—I am sending up with this note a parishioner of mine who is the wife of a man here that

seems to me to have a very good case for claiming a castle and other property ; but, of course, I am not a lawyer and you are, and you will be able to say if there is anything in it. She is very nervous, so she brings a friend with her. I have told her that if there is any lawyer living who will be able to help her husband to his rights you are that man, and that I know you will give her your best advice to oblige me. Besides, I suppose that if the man really has a good case it would be in your line, and, of course, he ought to pay you well if you get the property for him.—Yours ever,

GEORGE TUCKER."

I perused the epistle with dismay, divining only too surely what was in store for me, and looked up at the clerk, who was still struggling to preserve a faint imitation of decorum.

"There are two women waiting, sir, and they said they wished to see you immediately, and it was most important. They wanted to come in with me, but I said I must give you the letter first, and they are waiting just outside your door."

Great emergencies beget calmness in really noble characters. I sighed, and bade the clerk show them in. Two females thereupon entered my room, and I had no difficulty in making out which was the interested person and which was the friend, because the latter assumed very ostentatiously the air of a lady-in-waiting or supporter to my real client. She held the client's handkerchief for instance, mopped the client's brow, assisted the client to remove her gloves, and fished out of her own pockets, and handed solemnly to her, papers evidently brought for the

purposes of the interview. She might have been her bridesmaid at her wedding, her devoted friend at her execution, or her sympathetic companion at the funeral of one of her near relatives, and shadowed forth dimly to me all those possible associations in turn. These services of love were all rendered in pantomime without the slightest reference to me, and then both of them settled down with an obvious intention of having it out, and a conscious air of conferring favours on me by consulting me about a business of such extreme importance. One peculiarity about the client I must mention, because it had a powerful effect on my nerves all through the interview. For some reason best known to herself, and perhaps to the medical faculty, she had a prodigious fortification of cotton wool in each ear. Whenever she spoke she kept the two balls of cotton wool in position, and whenever she wished to listen (which I am bound to add was not often) she took them out and held them till I had finished, or she had heard as much as she cared about, and then put them back as a signal that she had commenced talking again. Her dialect was that of the cockney rather than of the rustic, as my friend's parish was within easy reach of London and a favourite haunt of the cyclist and the tripper.

“ Mr. Tucker the vicar, and a nice good gent 'e is, told my 'usband and me that you was quite respectable, and knew wot was wot, and 'e said we couldn't do better than bring it to you, and that 'e was sure you wouldn't charge anything unless you got the property for us, and it wouldn't much matter in a way of speakin' if you did charge as we couldn't pay and there's nothing to take except a few sticks of furniture and a pig ; but if we get the property my 'usband

says 'e will act 'andsome, and 'is word is truer than 'is bond though I says it, and our name is 'Awkins, well known in the village, and you may ask any one, and my friend 'ere is Mrs. Gill, well known likewise."

Mrs. Hawkins paused for breath, not having yet got her second wind, and removed the cotton wool as a signal that I might have a turn.

"Well, we won't say anything about charging, but as I am very busy let me just hear what it is all about. I see your friend is holding some papers for you. Shall I look at them first?"

That suggestion did not in the least commend itself to Mrs. Hawkins. She evidently wished to lead up to the papers, to walk round about them, to approach them with reverence, to prepare me for their enormous importance. So she put back the cotton wool and presented the family case in her own way, which was a very circuitous way, and intersected by many side-paths which she went down and then up again, sometimes coming back to the main road where she had left it, but oftener not.

I would not attempt to repeat the narrative even if I could, and indeed one of these pedigree cases in humble life is just the same as another in all essential features. There is always a property with or without a title. It has always become diverted from the rightful owner by fraud, or by ignorance of the existence of some one who went to sea and was supposed to be drowned but was not really drowned, or who was a bit wild and enlisted, or who in some other manner dropped out of the branches of the family tree. The claimant always derives his unimpeachable title to the property by tracing descent

from the person originally excluded. In doing so he always jumps over any number of gaps, violates any number of rules of descent, assumes any number of impossible events to have happened, possesses no evidence or information worth a threepenny bit, and derives immense moral support from the possession of two or three grimy papers which have as much to do with the subject as *Magna Charta*.

There is also a peculiarity in these cases which confronted me with particular severity on the occasion to which I am now referring. The least doubt as to the title of the claimant being as plain as a pike-staff to the meanest intellect is regarded either as a personal affront, or received with pitying contempt as a confession of professional incompetence. When I hinted mildly to Mrs. Hawkins (I did it mildly because Westminster experiences had taught me that the ice was thin) that I feared her papers did not carry her husband very far on the desired road, she did not answer me at all but constituted her friend a sort of arbitrator between us, and turning to her said she should like to know what more anybody who understood things could want. The friend said so should she indeed, and then they glared at me in a duet of silent scorn.

I replied, still mildly, that it was difficult to explain to them what more I did want (my greatest want on earth at the moment was to get rid of them), but that after reading the papers and listening to Mrs. Hawkins I was afraid that, before even an opinion could be formed, an immense amount of additional information was required, which it would occupy a long time to get, and which would cost a

great deal of money, and might in the end only result in showing that the claim could not succeed. I am afraid this was not quite a truthful statement, because it was very clear to me that there was not a shadow of a claim, and that tons of additional materials would not help to build one, but I put it that way because Mrs. Hawkins was evidently beginning to bridle, and she was a powerfully built woman with a rather flaming type of countenance.

When I had delivered myself of this remark she first restored the globes of cotton wool to her ears, then she sniffed as the war horse is usually understood to sniff battle ; then she asked her friend in withering tones what she, the friend, thought of me as a lawyer, to which the friend replied, "Well, I don't think much of 'im myself, that's wot I don't think, dear."

Then Mrs. Hawkins turned on me and said in a very loud voice and with a very red face that I shouldn't have the case, not if she was to starve for it ; that she was surprised, she was, that the vicar didn't know better than to allow her to waste her time and money to come up and see me, that every one she or her husband had ever spoken to had entirely agreed with them that the case was so clear that immediately it was begun the others wouldn't fight, not they indeed ; and finally that she didn't value my opinion against them a pin no not a pin, and there were plenty of lawyers who did know their business. With this parting benediction, she said "good morning" as if the words came out of a steel trap, called to her friend to "come along" as if there were pollution in my very presence, or danger of being kidnapped, and having poured on me most of the vials of her wrath, she, as I afterwards

heard, emptied the remainder on the head of the unfortunate vicar, to whom she paid a boiling hot visit immediately on her return. I for my part smoothed my ruffled feathers as well as I could, and turned my attention to more satisfactory business.

I used to ask about Hawkins and his case periodically afterwards when I went to stay with my friend the vicar, and once when walking with him I met Mrs. Hawkins in the village street. She turned very red, and upon my word I believe I did too. She also turned up her nose at me and muttered something that sounded like "lawyer indeed—well I'm sure!"

I never heard that any legal gentleman espoused the cause of Hawkins, whose castle still remains in the air with many other castles that require no foundations, cost nothing to build, never need to be repaired, will take in any number of guests, and look most brilliant when lighted up. I had a castle of that sort myself once, and it was called Castle Hope, but somehow or other, after it had been mine for a good many years, it passed away from me into the possession of a very much younger man than myself, and I have been looking about unsuccessfully ever since to find another to suit me.

TREAGLE'S PETITION

TREAGLE was the first person with whom I made friends upon entering at a very early age the mazes of the law, and his petition was the first important document that I ever had to do with.

Though quite a young man, with dramatic tendencies and a rooted antipathy to work of every description, he was the living embodiment of a Chancery suit. I mean this literally, because his father had been a gentleman of some position, who had spent his money too freely, and had mortgaged his property to a Life Office who were clients of the firm. The mortgage had been foreclosed ; and he had departed this life leaving his blessing, his encumbrances, his one son, and nothing else behind him. The firm had had compassion on the orphan lad, and taken him in sheer kindness into the office ; and they would have made a lawyer of him if they could, that is to say, if he could have been made one, but he was not cut that way. It was a popular tradition in the office that the only important act of business Treagle had ever done was to go and wait in the Rolls Yard for one hour in order to be able to make an affidavit afterwards that he, Treagle, had not himself come there during that period and paid off, in manner provided by a certain Chancery decree, a mortgage of £60,000 due from his late father to clients of the firm. The story, like

many other good ones, was probably a little coloured, but there certainly was a more or less solid foundation of truth in it. Treagle was a sore trial to the Managing Chancery Clerk, and would have taxed the patience of a saint.

His petition, as I say, was the first important document that I ever had to do with. I had a good deal to do with it, because Treagle rather leant on me than otherwise during its preparation, for no particular reason that I am aware of, except that we soon struck up a friendship, that Treagle's compositions did not flow easily, and that I threw out dark hints soon after I entered the offices that I "wrote for the magazines." My writing for the magazines at that period took the practical form of sending off at intervals to editors portentous packets containing contributions from my pen that deserved to be immortal, and receiving back the same with great regularity addressed to me in my own writing, and stamped at my expense, but that is neither here nor there. I did write for them, and if they did not choose to perceive the hall-mark of genius in my literary productions, it was their fault, not mine; and I cannot doubt that they have since repented in sackcloth and ashes, and would now offer fabulous sums for the merest trifle from my pen.

The object of the petition was an advance of pay. As Treagle remarked to me, "A chap can't grow fat on thirty bob a week," and that was the amount of his salary. I should, personally, be glad to grow thin on that or any lesser sum, having developed a tendency to corpulence, but Treagle and I were as thin as herrings then, and his way of putting it touched me. Besides, I was proud to be honoured with his confidences.

"What do you propose to say?" I asked, when Treagle

unfolded to me his desire for increase of pay, and his intention of petitioning for it.

“Why, you know, I thought of saying something about great increase of work in Chancery department, and—and—all that sort of thing.”

“Is your own work harder than it was?”

“Well, you know, as far as that goes,” replied Treagle, with a suggestion of pink mantling on his cheeks, “I don’t know that I do so much more myself. Still, a chap can’t grow fat on thirty bob a week.”

That was Treagle’s sheet-anchor, and a very good one I thought it.

So, one afternoon, when Treagle had returned from a round of duties in the courts and public offices, and had recorded in his petty cash-book “O’bus 6d.” (being at once an abbreviation of the word “omnibus” and a poetic figure, as he had walked both ways), and had prepared the draft of an affidavit of service, and (with much more sustained attention) the draft of a programme of some theatricals in which he was to take part, Treagle and I set to work upon the petition.

He wrote a beautiful hand, and when he began with the word “Gentlemen,” and hemmed in the “G” in a sort of bird-cage of artistic flourishes, it seemed to me that the petition must carry everything before it.

“*In consequence of the great increase of work in the Chancery department,*” went on Treagle, and then came to a full stop.

“*In which I have not personally taken any active part,*” I suggested when he paused.

“Look here,” replied Treagle, “if you’re going to help

a chap, help a chap ; and if you're going to play the fool, play it, and say so."

I begged his pardon, and protested my anxiety to give him all the help I could, and as evidence of that disposition, I suggested as the next sentence :

"I venture to ask that the amount of my present salary be taken into consideration——"

Treagle liked that, and took it down. Emboldened by his approval I went on :

"With a view to its being immediately raised to at least forty shillings a week."

Treagle shook his head.

"That's much too stiff," he said. "They wouldn't stand being collared like that, and would tell me to go and be blowed. We must grovel, or I shan't have a chance."

He balanced a ruler thoughtfully on his nose, and then proceeded :

"and that you will very kindly raise it a little, as I find it very hard to make both ends meet."

So he did, poor fellow, especially the end that had to provide him with the means of cutting a dash among his dramatic and other associates.

He looked at me for an inspiration, and I in turn looked at him. Ideas did not romp in upon us somehow.

"Can't you say something about having been here a long time ?" I asked.

He shook his head, and remarked laconically, "Haven't."

"At all events, you can make no end of promises for the future."

He brightened up, and said he thought that might wash.

"Put in something like this," I suggested, pleased with my powers of inspiration :

"If you should graciously accede to my request, my very best efforts will be cheerfully given to promote your interests by earnest and zealous work, and I shall always be most happy to stay up to any hour at night."

"No, I'm blessed if I shall," interrupted Treagle. "Half-past nine to six is quite as much as I can stomach of this confounded place. It's all right down to 'earnest and zealous work,' because that's a matter of opinion, but we'll stow the remarks about night, young Turner." So we stowed them, and he wound up, with any amount of flourishes—

"I am, gentlemen,

"Your obedient servant,

"WILLIAM TREAGLE."

Treagle insisted on posting this manifesto, in an envelope marked "Private," from Pentonville, and he (and in a lesser degree, I) awaited the answer in feverish impatience. Among other reasons, his landlady was a little pressing just then, and had thrown out strong hints that a payment on account would oblige ; in addition to which he was to appear shortly as a baronet at some theatricals got up by an Amateur Dramatic Club of which he was a leading light, and his best trousers were very baggy at the knees and otherwise unbaronet-like ; so that much depended on the petition.

The firm did not appear to be moved to its base. Business went on as usual, and several days elapsed before any outward and visible sign appeared on Treagle's horizon. At length, however, the answer came, and even before reading it I inferred that it was unsatisfactory, because when I

arrived in the morning, Treagle's face was a picture of haughty pride, interspersed with a dash of blank disappointment that he could not conceal. He flung a letter on my table, and, in tones of withering scorn, asked me what I thought of *that* for beastly ingratitude and meanness.

"Messrs. Decimus, Caldecott & Bradbury are unable to comply with Mr. Treagle's request. The increase of work in his department has not, as they regret to note, been attended by corresponding indications of increased personal exertions on his part, and the salary at present paid to him fully represents the firm's estimate of the value of his services. Any efforts on Mr. Treagle's part to merit advancement by greater assiduity will be promptly recognised."

Treagle walked about for some days after that with the demeanour of a crushed tragedian upon him, but his natural sweetness of temper soon asserted itself again, and before long his petition was a standing joke between us. Perhaps it would have been wiser if, instead of making a jest of the petition, he had taken to heart the answer to it, but the law was not in him, and he soon turned his back on it for good or evil, but whether for the one or the other I know not, as he went abroad, and our paths in life have never converged since.

TREAGLE'S FLEETING HONOURS

In a previous paper I referred to my acquaintance in early life with one Treagle, who was an office companion of mine during part of my period of Articles of Clerkship, and who, like the cavalry officer in one of Robertson's plays, if he got very little pay, did very little work for it. I am moved now to describe a dramatic representation in which Treagle played a conspicuous part, and to which he kindly invited me. At least it was not perhaps exactly an invitation in one sense, because I had to pay two shillings each for my tickets, but that outlay secured me very distinguished and prominent seats—in the first row of all, to be exact—and the entertainment was well worth all the money. The only regret I experienced was a painful suspicion that a good many tickets had been given away, and that, as compared with others in the audience, I had not been put on what financiers I believe love to call "bed-rock" terms. It is one of the highest instincts I take it of human nature, that we all like to be treated equally with or better than our fellow-men, though we do not always do unto others what we expect them to do for us.

I have referred to my seats in the plural. I feel at liberty to mention at this very considerable distance of time that a young lady, by the name of Jessie Stone, went with me. She was not of exalted rank, but she was as

good as she was beautiful, and *vice versa*, as beautiful as she was good. I was very much in love with her, and I confided daily to Treagle that I hoped at a somewhat remote date to be in a position to call her my bride. I never did arrive at that proud moment, most fortunately for both of us ; and I decline to state which of us proved fickle. It is enough to record the fact that she never became mine, and ultimately bestowed herself on a young man in a linen-draper's shop, to whom I trust she proved a treasure beyond pearls.

The first thing I realised when we arrived at the theatre, which was not a theatre at all, but a long room with a stage put up at one end of it, and took our places, was that the orchestra consisted of a young woman and a piano, and that the young woman was exactly in front of us, and had her hair done up at the back in a chignon of large size even for those days. It was so large, and so very close to us, that it operated like a sort of eclipse, and we had to dodge round it in order to get a clear view of the stage. The young woman was evidently an amateur, and one of Treagle's dramatic associates, for when not actually playing she turned her head round and nodded the same, chignon and all, to many of the audience with a good deal of gesticulation and freedom. She also had a terrible but very necessary mother sitting in our row, who to my great indignation then, but, as I now think, in my best interests, gave me a stony glare whenever I made a dab at Jessie's hand, which even under that discouragement I did on an average every ten minutes. When the be-chignonned daughter did play she strummed waltz music of the period very indifferently. I desire here and now, in a parenthesis,

to record my solemn conviction that the waltz music of that period was absolutely the most puerile, ridiculous, drivelling, namby-pamby stuff that was ever composed in this world. In saying that I am sheltered from an action of libel, because I mention no names and keep the period a deadly secret.

In due course, that is to say about twenty minutes behind time, the play began. I am sure it was quite a classic piece, and that I ought to remember the name of it, to say nothing of the author, but I have to confess that I do not, and must meekly bear whatever blame attaches to me. There were three acts, and the general idea of the play was that a young country baronet (Treagle was the young country baronet) was very much taken with the meretricious attractions of an adventuress who purported to be a widow, and called herself the Countess de Something, insomuch that he blindly overlooked the sterling virtues of a local lady, who, though not so showy, was distinctly good-looking in a modest English way, and positively exuding with those merits which go to constitute the model wife. A shrewd old widow lady, the mother of the baronet, appraised the two ladies at their respective proper values early in the first act, and by dint of employing a detective, who betrayed what he was in nearly every word and gesture to the meanest intellect, to make secret discoveries about the countess, gradually stripped the mask off that lady, until she ultimately made her exit, admitting fiercely that she was not a countess at all, and confessing to being married already to a suspicious-looking character whose presence on the stage had been a puzzle all through. She said very nasty things as she swept out of the room followed

by her husband, and slammed the door in a manner that made the whole room rock for several minutes, as if an earthquake were included in the scenic effects. Comic relief was afforded by two characters, who had nothing to do with the play, but came in and sat on two chairs, with a representation behind them of what appeared to be Hampton Court in the distance ; but why Hampton Court, and why the two chairs, and why the two characters, this deponent could not tell then, and certainly cannot make up the deficiency now. Within five minutes after professing for the last of innumerable times his passionate attachment to the adventuress, the baronet, on her being ultimately exposed, discovered that all along his real affections (admirably concealed from view) had been in the keeping of the local lady, and the curtain fell as he, with a wealth of meaning, held out his arms and said, "Mary!" and she, without a moment's hesitation, fell into them, and said, "Arthur!"

This brief sketch will doubtless recall to the faithful playgoer the name of the piece and its author. The personal interest in it for me was of course largely centred in Treagle, who, as I thought, acquitted himself admirably, and the more so as he was a good deal handicapped by adverse circumstances. It has to be confessed that the piece was not staged or dressed with the luxury which these latter days demand, nor were the pecuniary resources of Treagle and his companions in art equal to any great demand, even when measured by the modest requirements of that time. It is true that he had somehow acquired for the occasion a portentous moustache, which he stroked in the most baronet-like manner. He even tried to twirl it,

but the twist he gave made the left-hand half come off, and he had to hold it in its place until he could get off and apply more gum. His costume was deficient also in variety. A double-breasted black morning coat with a bordering of braid, then very popular, which poor old Treagle had bought ready-made in Middle Row, Holborn (where art thou now, oh! Middle Row, Holborn, of my youth?), with myself in attendance as a committee of taste, had to do duty all through the play. In that useful but monotonous garment he came in from a morning ride, sallied forth to hunt in the winter, gave a picnic in the woods in the summer, and dressed for dinner with a white tie to mark the distinction. Motives of delicacy forbid me to dwell on his nether garments, but I must just say that they were baggy at the knees to an extent that passes words. He also had about him on all these very dissimilar occasions a tall hat, likewise purchased in Holborn in my company, and worn daily to the office, which he kept trying to get rid of, with the result of somebody sitting on it or knocking it over. I cannot acquit Treagle of blame as regards that article, because it really was not necessary in any scene, and was terribly out of place in most of them. I have a suspicion that if brown shoes had been in existence then he would have worn them, but they were not, and he was finished off with Blucher boots, which were never elegant as a species, and are, I suppose, as extinct now as Blucher himself.

Looking back calmly now, I fear I must describe the acting as rudimentary, and admit that even Treagle was not above criticism; but I was less exacting, or perhaps I ought to say captious, then, and I, and therefore my young lady companion, applauded violently whenever he

came on and whenever he went off, and whenever he said anything that we thought spirited and out of the common, and also after each act. His exits, I remember, were remarkable, for he nearly always persisted in going out with a lady on each arm (a situation in which Adonis himself would look an ass), and as the doors were narrow, and the party of three always foolishly tried to charge at them walking abreast of each other, they got jammed every time this incident occurred, the sequel being an unseemly scrimmage and the survival of the fittest.

The audience were very friendly, and indeed composed almost entirely of relatives and friends of the performers, and beyond a slight tendency to giggle when unrehearsed effects occurred—among them I remember a moon that was very skittish and un-astronomical, and a curtain that refused to come down when Treagle was finishing an act on one knee before the countess—the players had every reason to be satisfied with the encouragement bestowed on their efforts, and I may add that they undoubtedly were, if I may judge of Treagle as an example.

It had been arranged that I should go round to the stage door after the performance with Jessie and introduce her to Treagle, and then we were both to escort her home, and then I was to go to his lodgings with him for supper. He no sooner joined us in a dark passage and made the acquaintance of Jessie than he eagerly asked—

“How do you think it went?”

“Splendidly,” we both said heartily, in chorus.

“Did I get through all right?”

Fervent assurances, again in chorus, that he got through admirably and played the part to the life.

"Did you like the way I turned on the countess when I discovered what sort of woman she really was?"

The chorus liked it more than they could possibly express, and considered it the finest bit of acting in a performance of immense merit.

"Fairbrother wasn't much good, was he, as the real husband?"

I was about to speak up for Fairbrother, and in fact began, "Oh! yes, we thought him—" when I caught a look on Treagle's face which told me that it would not be agreeable to him if praise were lavished on Fairbrother, so I rather inconsequently died away with the words, "very poor," upon which the cloud immediately disappeared from Treagle's brow. In fact, he then relented so far as to say that Fairbrother would not be such a bad actor if he did not think such a confounded lot of himself, adding in a tone that plainly showed how amazing he considered Fairbrother's assurance, "he actually wanted to play my part!"

Chorus signified that such an idea on the part of Fairbrother was beyond human understanding, and we all laughed heartily at his impudence.

I could not help noticing that Treagle had, so to speak, brought the baronet out of the theatre with him, and that the rank which he had adorned during the evening died hard. He assumed an air of courtly condescension, and wore his hat a little on one side in a rakish and, as he evidently thought, aristocratic manner. He spoke as if in some undefined way he were removed from our humble sphere and stood to us in the relationship of a patron. He addressed us once as "you two silly children," and

told Jessie patronisingly that this youngster (meaning me) was not a bad boy but required looking after ; which indeed was, I regret to say, perfectly true, but Treagle was not exactly such a model supervisor for a budding articled clerk as his experienced man-of-the-world tone seemed to imply, nor had he ever, to the best of my belief, cumbered me with sage advice.

Then as the baronet faded another tendency developed on Treagle's part. He talked darkly of chucking up the law and going on the stage. He compared himself generally with "other chaps" who were making a very good thing of it, and opined that he was just as good as they were, and that if he could once get known he would soon go ahead.

Chorus intimated that he was not only as good as, but much better than other chaps, and that if he once made a start he would soon show the public what acting was.

Do not suppose that in responding thus to Treagle's mood we were consciously guilty of servile flattery. We were not at a critical age remember, and we really had thought Treagle rather fine, and, moreover, we felt a glow of conscious pride in having been permitted to go to a stage door and wait for the principal male character and walk along the street with him ; and there was just that difference between Treagle's age and our ages to set him on a pedestal of superiority.

Poor Treagle ! He was (as in a previous paper shown) a lawyer's clerk, in the receipt of a salary of thirty shillings a week. It may not have been the best possible thing for him to try and imagine himself a baronet, either on or off the stage, or to contemplate a theatrical career, for which I do not suppose he had the smallest talent or calling.

But the first vision had faded even before he and I came in sight of his cheap and shabby lodgings in Pentonville that night, and as for his stage fever, I know that it did not last long, and whatever he did in after life he certainly never pursued that vainglorious and most uncertain calling. Not much harm was done therefore by his flight of fancy into realms that for a brief space enabled him to forget the rather dismal reflections in which he often indulged, and which were generally summed up by his heaving a sigh and remarking, "I tell you what it is, young Turner, a chap can't grow fat on thirty bob a week."

We escorted the fair Jessie to the door of the house wherein she resided with her parents, and Treagle appropriately turned away while I said good-night to her, and for the fiftieth time vowed one of those vows of which only about one in fifty ever comes to anything, the other forty-nine being carried away by the wind. And then Treagle and I made our way on the top of an omnibus to Pentonville, where he was to entertain me to a little supper and a game of cards before the pleasures of the evening ended.

He lodged in a house which had all the dignity of being No. 23 in something Square, but I cannot pretend to say that the houses were large or tidy looking, or the Square itself cheerful to the eye. Of course, on this particular occasion it was dark, and I could not judge, but I saw it once on a Saturday afternoon, and it presented a most melancholy and neglected sight, though there was, as Treagle said, a very open view from his window, if by that he meant an extensive panorama of cats, alive and dead, brick-bats, decaying vegetable refuse, abandoned sheets of newspaper, empty tins, moribund trees, consumptive shrubs,

and grass that would make any respectable animal shudder ; the whole being kept more or less in bounds by iron railings, of which a good many had yielded to the ravages of time, aided by the importunity of the youths of the neighbourhood, and disappeared.

Treagle shared a very small sitting-room and bedroom with a young friend named Tucker, who had not gone to the entertainment that evening because his occupation, whatever it was, kept him too late. He was a nice-looking lad, and had a profound admiration for Treagle, and especially of his dramatic talents.

On a very small table stood a very large pork-pie, a great chunk of bread, and a colossal can of porter, and, as local newspapers say, when describing a dinner at the Bull's Head, covers were laid for three. The pork-pie was then cut by Treagle into three parts, the bread similarly divided, and the can of porter passed round so regularly that one head seemed to be nearly always inside it and the other two waiting for their turn to disappear in like fashion.

Middle-aged or elderly reader, think of it ! Think of consuming a huge wedge of pork-pie and a lump of bread, and putting your head into a can of porter at twelve o'clock at night, and then retaining any hope of surviving till the next morning. Think of the nauseating struggle to get down Pentonville pork-pie at all, and at any hour, and above all at that hour. Think of the consequences of taking deep draughts of porter—don't misunderstand me, I say porter, and I mean porter as black as your hat, referring of course to your Sunday best hat. But we three young men did it, and enjoyed it, and laughed over it, and had no fear that when we rose in the morning we should all be dead men. And then we smoked tobacco

on the top of it, and not one of us so much as turned pale or had a pain anywhere, or felt a bit the worse next day. Middle-aged or elderly reader, I mingle my tears with yours (whether my own tears are middle-aged or elderly boots not as long as they are copious, and I assure you they are), and sing a dirge with you over the days of ostrich digestion that are no more, and I express an earnest hope that you can still occasionally eat oysters late at night, and don't mind the expense.

But passing away from vain regrets to historical facts, let me record that before we settled down to supper Tucker began a fire of eager questions about the play in general, and Treagle's own part in particular. He addressed himself at first to Treagle, but that distinguished actor pointed to me, and with a slight return of the baronet manner told him to "ask young Turner there." So I said all over again very much what I had said before in the street, and Tucker followed with a running fire of admiring comments and questions, such as, "I knew he would do that well," and "Was he very fine in that bit where he chuck's up the countess?" and "Isn't he good in that scene with his mother, when he won't believe what she tells him?" It appeared that his familiarity with the piece resulted from his having heard Treagle his part, of which service he was most refreshingly proud. I wonder what Tucker's terms would be for hearing anybody the same part now in small Pentonville lodgings at all sorts of late evening hours.

I don't know how long the catechism might have lasted but for the fact that I was very hungry, and at last gave such piteous glances at the pork-pie, that even Treagle's tickled vanity could not resist my mute appeal, and he summoned us to the feast. We talked of course then, but

only in broken sentences. You cannot utter many pregnant remarks with your head in a can of porter, or a large piece of pork-pie in course of transit.

And then—bless us and save us—we positively worked off more exuberance of youth by playing “nap,” and I am afraid we played for money ; but my reader will be relieved to hear that we played for very little money, not being any of us millionaires, but on the contrary as poor as rats, and all of us afflicted at the time with a very acute form of what Treagle called “Shorts,” and, as a literal fact, I rose a heated winner of ninepence, which Treagle and Tucker lost to me in about equal proportions ; I say I rose, and indeed it was about time I did, for the night was far advanced, and I had a long way to go. But I was proud of staying up very late in those days on special occasions, and I bragged insufferably about it in the office next day, and I fear added at least an hour to the true reckoning of time.

So the thirty-shilling-a-week clerk was for one evening at all events a baronet, and also a great actor in his own eyes and in mine. I do not know whether the memory of it was comforting or bitter to him afterwards, but I do know that on the very next day Treagle was addressed by one of the partners in the following incisive terms : “Mr. Treagle, there is not one single word right in this from beginning to end. Whatever I give you to do, I have to give to somebody else afterwards to do over again. You either have no brains or you don’t try to use them. You are the most careless and incompetent clerk I have ever had to do with, and why we keep you I really don’t know, and I don’t suppose you could tell me yourself.”

Sic transit gloria mundi.

THE CREDULITY OF LAWYERS

I SUPPOSE that if I were to describe lawyers as a credulous and soft-hearted class of the community the observation would be received with derisive laughter from all parts of the house ; and I suppose also that if that statement were to carry conviction—which I neither expect nor desire for a moment—I should, vulgarly speaking, be giving away the show and stripping off some part at least of the feeling of awe with which members of the profession are regarded by the British public. Nevertheless I do say it, and I am prepared to prove it.

No class of the community is more easily taken in by arts of imposture as transparent as those of the elderly gentlemen who, when walking in the streets of London—Kensington preferred, but I don't know why—places his hand suddenly to his forehead, calls out loudly as one in pain, sinks by easy stages to the pavement, and then with the aid of a piece of soap proceeds to foam at the mouth. If not interrupted rudely by a policeman he reaps on these occasions a considerable harvest, beginning with a gift in kind in the shape of brandy, and finishing with sympathetic offerings of silver. Parenthetically, I may remark that I was once a donor of brandy to this elderly person, and on another occasion I was about to take part in the silver stage of donations when a member of the force appeared,

and, looking down upon the prostrate sufferer, he remarked, "What, at it again, old Jimmy!" These simple words had a startling effect on the sick man, and he did not even wait for the collection, and probably pursued his virtuous calling on the other side of Hyde Park for some time afterwards.

My illustration has, of course, merely shown me up personally in the light of a flat, or, as the next generation after mine would render it, a mug, and one idiot does not make an Earlswood Asylum, but I am now coming to real business, and I resort again to illustration as the most effective, not to say graphic, way of proving my case. Some years ago a tall, cadaverous-looking man was brought into my presence as being introduced by relations of mine who were practising as solicitors in a large provincial town. I will not say that my heart fluttered in the expectation of lucrative business, because fortune does not usually come by that sort of route, but the mention of my relatives was at least a pass to my good graces. My visitor began by claiming them as old acquaintances, and, having broken the ice he told me that he was a solicitor, but that his health had broken down and he was obliged to go to Australia, where he hoped to re-establish it, and also to make a professional living. He mentioned the name of the place, which I had never heard of before, but as I plead guilty to the darkest ignorance of geography nothing turned upon that, and he expressed a hope that if I ever needed the assistance of a correspondent in that direction I would bear him in mind. The odds against my having any such need were at least a million to one, but I politely told him that I should be happy to note his name and address, though I feared it was not a very likely contingency.

This would seem a natural termination to a brief interview that if not lucrative was also not painful. But it was nothing of the sort. My visitor produced a book with a black leather cover, and said that many members of the legal profession had expressed a wish to assist him in his new start in life, and he thought I might possibly like to add my name to those in the book. I opened it, and there, beyond all possible manner of doubt, were the names of many eminent barristers and leading firms of solicitors who had subscribed to the good cause. Many of the signatures were well known to me, and among them my visitor did not omit to point out those of my country relatives.

This imposing lead in professional charity was far too overpowering for me to do otherwise than follow it, and I added my humble name and my modest subscription, and my visitor melted with the book and the money, and bade me an airy colonial sort of farewell.

Time passed on, and a year or more had elapsed, during which I had forgotten the existence of my cadaverous friend, when, to my great surprise, his name was brought in to me again, and a faint suspicion of whisky seemed to float in at the same time. He felt, I suppose, that a rather awkward gap had to be bridged over, so he plunged *in medias res* with easy assurance that would have done credit to Alfred Jingle.

“Well, Mr. Turner, I have just called to tell you that at last I am really starting.”

I intimated rather coldly that I had understood him to have one foot on the shore and the other on the briny ocean when I had had the pleasure of seeing him a con-

siderable time before, and that I had contributed to his expenses upon that supposition.

"And so I was—everything packed up and passage taken. And then I had a great misfortune. I was riding on the top of an omnibus, and was just going to get down when I tripped and fell right into the road and broke my leg. I was laid up in the hospital for nine months, and when I came out I was too weak to travel, and have only just pulled round, and it has taken away nearly all my money, but, thank God, I am really off at last this time, and a great many gentlemen in the profession are very kindly helping me to go."

Out came the black-covered book again, and as sure as eggs were eggs I found another long list of well-known professional names—mostly the same as those in the first edition.

Think of the ludicrous improbability of the story: the melting away of fund No. 1; the absence of any evidence whatsoever that this accident had ever happened, or if it had, that it had exhausted the fund subscribed; the matchless impudence of milking the same legal cow again with the same story, and no new feature but a broken leg; the utter absence of any single, reliable fact to justify the pouring of guineas into this man's lap. I am asserting a general proposition, and the question of my personal conduct is of no moment, but as a matter of fact, at the second time of asking, my gorge fairly rose, and I flatly declined to be bled. My visitor expressed surprise and even grief for me that I should be so hard hearted, as indeed he well might, considering the number of legal gudgeon he had landed with apparent ease on this second occasion, and the

unfavourable contrast from his point of view between their conduct and mine.

It is superfluous to say that I did not receive a third visit from this person, nor did I ever hear anything more about him ; but I have often wondered whether he afterwards broke successively the other leg, and both arms, and his collar bone, and then injured himself internally, and then went round his limbs again, and then had a succession of serious illnesses ; and whether on each occasion his start for Australia was delayed for one year, his funds exhausted, and a fresh list of subscriptions started in the book with the black cover. Anyhow, I had figured once in that book in the character of a subscriber, and then in another sense I got into his black book again. There is a play upon words concealed so effectually in the last sentence, that I fear it might not be noted if I did not draw attention to it, and on principle I do not like flowers to blush unseen.

My next illustration is drawn from the East—not my more or less native Whitechapel, but the real article.

I was seated one day at my office engaged in my usual task of imitating the busy bee so far as it was possible to do it in the absence of any shining hour to improve, the period being February. To me was brought in a slip with an Oriental name on it, unknown to me, but of such length that to suspect behind it a desire to sell me carpets or pirated photographs would have been sheer impiety. The owner was admitted, and proved to be in appearance a young and particularly good-looking native of India, hailing from Bombay. He introduced himself as the son of a native judge, brother of an articled pupil in a well-known firm of Bombay solicitors with whom I had business rela-

tions, and an intimate friend of all the partners in that firm, and of one in particular who was rather dearer to him than life. He then unfolded the following touching story. By reason of family influence and a good knowledge of languages (he certainly spoke English as well as I did), he had secured an appointment as secretary to an Indian Rajah who had undertaken a tour in Europe. But as ill-fortune would have it my young visitor had contracted a severe illness while his employer was in Paris, and was so completely invalidated that the Rajah was obliged to leave him behind there and proceed on his tour minus his secretary. The Rajah had left a liberal provision for his needs, but the illness had lasted so long that by the time he was able to leave Paris his funds were all but exhausted, and he had now come over to London almost penniless, until he could get remittances, and was unable to communicate with the Rajah for divers very satisfactory reasons, and among others that the latter was now on the high seas. To verify his respectability he produced a letter from the India Office written on the official paper, which contained some sort of description of him in the nature of a testimonial to his virtues.

He told me that in calling on me he had two favours to ask. One was that I would be so kind as to procure for him admission to the House of Commons, as he was most anxious to hear a debate. The other was that I would advance him a few pounds to carry him over his temporary exhaustion of funds, with an assurance that I would get it back from the firm of solicitors in Bombay, who would instantly reimburse any advance made to him.

In self-defence I feel bound to maintain that the story

was plausible, and the anxiety expressed to gain admission to the House of Commons, as being the more important request, a stroke of genius and a spoon-bait of surpassing attraction. The young man left with an advance, the amount of which I decline to mention, and a promise to get him an order for the House of Commons. He was to call for it on a day agreed.

The child of the East duly turned up for the House of Commons order. I was out at the time and he saw a junior partner of mine, to whom I had told the story. He got the order and he likewise got a further advance. By a pleasing fiction I have always persuaded myself that if I had been in he would not have got that second advance, but I am quite sure he would all the same.

I wrote out to Bombay in due course describing what had occurred, mentioning the advances, and expressing the pleasure it had afforded me to help their young friend in his emergency. I did not ask that the cheque to reimburse my advance might be accompanied by something in the way of a chased silver ornament for the dinner-table, which I should have personally taken home, as a chased silver ornament cannot be divided with junior partners, but the thought did cross my mind that it would be a gracious recognition of my goodness.

While yet my letter was on its way to Bombay, or at all events before the answer came, I took up a newspaper, and my eye lighted on an account of a misfortune which had befallen my young friend, and was recorded, I grieve to say, not in the fashionable or miscellaneous intelligence, but in the police news. He had obtained advances from several other solicitors by exactly parallel devices, with

appropriate alterations of names and places to suit the particular victim, and was pursuing a successful if not meritorious career. But it came to pass that he presented himself at the office of a solicitor who had relations with a firm in Calcutta, and he played off the Calcutta firm exactly as he had in my case traced his visit to my connection with a Bombay firm. All might have answered his best expectations but for the unfortunate circumstance that a member of the Calcutta firm was in London at the time, and not only in London, but at that identical moment in the office of his London correspondents on whom the young man had called. The India Office paper had been stolen by this hopeful youth when paying visits there for imaginary objects, and the official description of his merits was really autobiographical and more inaccurate even than most autobiographies; the Rajah was a fiction, and the law list had furnished the necessary links between solicitors in London and firms in India for whom they acted as agents.

The result was eighteen months with hard labour for the deceitful youth, and for me and several other solicitors the abstraction of coin made by hard labour, though not exactly of the same kind.

Though it has nothing to do with the serious and important subject to which this paper is directed, it might interest my readers, whom I number by thousands in my imagination, to know that, very shortly after partaking of skilly and performing hard labour for the allotted period, this adventurous youth started exactly the same method of gaining a livelihood, but varied the procedure by addressing his attentions to merchants in London with Indian connec-

tions. Fortune was again unkind, and he was for a second time sentenced to a considerable term of imprisonment. I do not know what his subsequent career has been, but his genius may have found an outlet in the direction of certain classes of financial operations connected with companies which are said to offer a very promising field to clever people.

Each of the two examples I have given has shown up the credulity of a considerable number of lawyers. The first was a barefaced imposture, of which the repetition, with a broken leg thrown in, was too impudent for words to describe it. The second was not quite so transparent, but still, to the intelligent reader, half-a-dozen inquiries will occur that should obviously have been made before coin of the realm was parted with, and any one of which would have exposed the swindle. I do not recall any more illustrations of the same wholesale nature, but I proceed to put myself in the pillory as a personal example of a lawyer taken in on innumerable occasions, and I venture to maintain that, even if all lawyers are not such boneless sardines as I am in the way of detecting imposture, still I do not figure in a class by myself.

I have provided the alleged son of an alleged Russian nihilist, alleged to be named Nicolaieff, with a guinea to get his alleged dress-clothes out of alleged pawn, in order to take up an alleged place as head waiter at an alleged hotel ; and I have found, too late, that men betray, and that there were no dress-clothes, and no pawning, and no head waiter's place, and no hotel.

I have advised a person bringing a bogus introduction

upon some ridiculous point, for a fee that was never paid, and have concluded the interview by putting my name down in a binding form as subscriber for some monumental work costing several pounds, that I did not want in the least, and have never opened since it was delivered at my gates.

I have known a fluent German to get past the barriers into my room, under pretence of being a client who must see me on important private business, and I have then learnt that his object was merely to sell me bad hock. *And I have bought it.* But, as I am a sinful man, I have never given it to my friends.

I have lent money, not as a scrivener, or an usurer, or a money-lender, but without interest, and merely as a donkey, to men who have either looked me in the face for years afterwards with the blandest affectation of not remembering the circumstance, or have treated me as a deadly enemy to be avoided in the market-place and all other places, and who, in both cases alike, have never so much as hinted at the paltry and contemptible idea of repaying me.

I have bought engravings, portraits, models in miniature of ships, and ditto of cathedrals, and water-colours—in-different in merit and expensive as regards price—from bibulous vendors who have piled up imaginary starving families for my edification, and who have virtually besieged me till I yielded, because I had not the moral courage to kick them out, or call for help, or because—yes, I will keep back nothing—because I have been taken in about the starving family until I have really thought quietly over the man's face afterwards, and realised the depth of my own muggery—if I may be allowed to coin a word, as a

very small set-off against coin that has been expended in the way I have described.

I have forgiven people who have robbed me, when I ought, on every principle as a good citizen, to have prosecuted them, merely because female relatives (not in the least prepossessing in appearance, and affording me no excuse on that ground) have called on me, dressed in mourning, as if it were a funeral, and blubbered, and shown an alarming tendency to kneel on my carpet and clasp my knees.

In short, I have been taken in on every side. The most transparent device has been good enough to catch me ; the most barefaced imposter has gulled me ; the most audacious borrower has found his way to my pocket as easily as if he were gently passing to it along a butter-slide ; the most unscrupulous vendor of worthless articles has, with the aid of a little touch of domestic misery thrown in, found me a sure heap on which to shoot rubbish. And if you think, dear reader, that I must indeed be a colossal Mug, let me declare to you that I have many professional brethren, I will not say mugger, but at least as muggy as I am.

Did I say as I am ? It was a slip of the pen, for I meant to say as I was. I have learnt my lesson at last, and no rogues or vagabonds need apply to me. I have locked up my heart, buttoned my pockets, established a system of sentinels to guard my room. I have decided never again to give anything to anybody, deserving or undeserving, in any possible circumstances, to turn away with anathemas from would-be borrowers, to believe no tales of distress, to purchase no more pretended works of art, bad wine, or

serial volumes sold by means of canvassing, to prosecute anybody who abstracts from me as much as a postage stamp. In short, I have at last become what a lawyer with a character for acuteness and worldly wisdom to lose really ought to be. It is never too late to mend.

*THE JOY THAT CAME IN THE
MORNING*

CHAPTER I

As a type of prosperity and distinction in life, justly won by commanding ability and sheer hard work, James Ferguson, Q.C., M.P., would have been difficult to beat. He had begun life as one of several sons of a not too successful doctor. He had gone to a London school where the fees were small and the prizes rich, and had carried off to the University of Oxford enough money in scholarships to support him while there, with the aid of rigid economy and self-denial on his own part. He had gained a Fellowship and saved enough out of it to pay the fees for his admission to the Bar, and his preparation for the practice of that profession. He had got into good practice without having to wait very long, though he did not possess a particle of influence with solicitors, which is the only influence worth two and sixpence to a barrister. And from that time he had never looked back, but had risen, risen, always risen, until now he was at the very top of the very highest tree that a successful barrister can climb, and that is a pretty tall tree I can tell you. If I were to try and tell you how tall, it would make your mouth water with envy as it does mine.

Even that was not all, for he had not only got into Parliament, but unlike most lawyers in the House of Commons, he was credited with having convictions, and not with having merely put on a party livery in the hope of exchanging it for an ermine robe ; and when he spoke, the House did not immediately become reduced in number to six members exclusive of the Speaker. This is, I believe, a high standard to reach in that assembly, wherein nevertheless there appears to be much cry and little wool.

He had a house in London, a house in the country, a moor in Scotland, a yacht, horses, men servants and maid servants, much gold and silver ; indeed, saving for some Oriental arrangements not permitted in the present day, the description of Solomon's possessions might have been almost applied to him. He would, no doubt, also have had several motor cars capable of going at the rate of an express train in crowded streets, and doing so whenever the police were not in sight, but that form of delight was not yet invented.

He had married comparatively early in life. It was a love match pure and simple, and the love had proved to be of an enduring kind, for Mr. Ferguson and his wife were lovers still at sixty years of age. A more devoted couple could not be imagined, and is very rarely seen.

But his domestic life was clouded by one great abiding trouble. He had only one child, a son, and that son was a drunken, disreputable blackguard. There was no other word for him.

Brought up kindly but not too indulgently, with every advantage of training and education that loving parental care could provide, with every legitimate advantage and

attraction that life could offer spread out before him, he had deliberately, wantonly, preferred the gutter, and he wallowed in it.

His father and mother had tried to reclaim him with the infinite patience that in this world only parents are generally capable of showing. Persuasion, entreaty, prayers had been lavished on him; safeguards had been built round him; he had been forgiven seventy times seven; his debts, all incurred in wanton and riotous living, had been paid over and over again. But it was all in vain, and every time he was lifted out of the mud he just slid back into it again, deeper and ever deeper.

It is said by the charitably minded that the very worst of human beings is not all bad, but possesses some redeeming feature, or at least some good quality. To find any good quality in Arthur Ferguson was extremely difficult, but if he possessed one at all, it was a certain amiability of disposition that never deserted him. Drunk or sober he was always good tempered, and preserved a semblance of polite and even courtly manners, that when he was drunk was both ludicrous and horrible to contemplate. But his good temper was to the poor wretch but an added source of weakness and depravity, because it predisposed him always to say yes to every low companion who beckoned to him to follow, and to become the paymaster and ready dupe of the infamous crew among whom he had cast in his lot. It was only too well known among his associates that while Ferguson had a sovereign in his pocket no throat belonging to a friend of his need be dry with thirst, and no such detestable throat was ever dry in those circumstances. He had gone into the army by his own desire,

and had got into and through Sandhurst, not with credit, but still he had scraped through, his record at that time showing much that was disquieting, but not giving promise of what was to follow. But military life in the English army allows idleness and enough to spare to the idly-disposed officer, and Arthur Ferguson was first idle, then vicious, then impossible as a British officer, and was only allowed to send in his papers at an hour's notice, with the alternative of being cashiered. From that moment he had descended at the rate of a hydraulic lift to perdition.

At what sacrifice to themselves of comfort and appearance and almost of outward family decency only they knew in bitter grief and shame, his father and mother had always kept their house open to Arthur when he would come and live there, in the faint hope that it might bring about better things, and he would come when he had not a shilling left in the world, and would otherwise have spent a night on a bench in the Park. Sometimes his arrival would take place in the middle of the night in a hansom cab, on which occasions there would be a ringing and disturbance at the door, and an altercation with the cabman, who had been driving him about from one evil haunt to another for hours, and whom he would have no money to pay. And then Warner the butler, an old servant who loved his master and mistress, and whose heart ached for them and also for the reprobate, whom he remembered as a fair-haired, bright-eyed boy, would come down quietly and pay the man and help the miserable wretch into the house and up to his own room, in his frowsy muddy clothes and battered-in hat, and whisper to him to "Go quietly, for God's sake, Mr. Arthur," and

not wake up his poor father and mother, as they were asleep. Wake them up indeed! Not a sound escaped them; and James Ferguson's hand would steal softly towards his wife and stroke her tearful face gently to comfort her, and he would say to her with heart-breaking sorrow gnawing at his own breast, "Don't cry, dear, pray, don't cry; perhaps this time he will stay quietly at home and turn over a new leaf." And she would strive hard to keep back the tears for the sake of her beloved husband, because she knew so well that her grief added a bitter pang to his.

After such an incident as this the stricken parents would leave their wretched son alone all the next day, knowing full well that Warner would look after him faithfully until he recovered to some extent from this the latest orgie, and that he would send for the family doctor, as he had standing orders to do if necessary. It was often necessary, for apart from the inroads that his mode of life made on his health, it was not unusual for Arthur to come back to the home he disgraced with marks on him of some drunken struggle or foul play.

On one occasion Arthur had returned after an unusually long absence. When he reached home he had not a penny on him, his watch and chain had gone, and even his studs and sleeve-links out of the shirt he was wearing, and his condition otherwise was, if possible, worse than usual. Warner saw the next morning on going into his room that he was really ill, and at once went for the doctor, who found him in a serious state. He had not actually had a paralytic seizure, but there were distinct threatenings of it.

The doctor had long given up hope of his reformation,

but he seized this opportunity to try and frighten him. He had attended the family ever since Arthur's birth, and was deeply sorry for the home trouble.

"Arthur," he said solemnly, "you are very ill, and at any moment I might have to say very dangerously ill. You have outraged your constitution so long that the time has come for its inevitable revenge on you. No regard for the father and mother whose hearts you are breaking has had any effect upon you, but I have something to say that may perhaps make you pause. Your present symptoms tell me beyond a shadow of doubt that if you go on leading the same life you will not live another twelve months. You must, whether you will or not, remain quietly here and in bed for many days. Think over what I have said, and try to realise what it is that you have been doing, and to what certain end it is bringing you, and what is the hereafter that you will have to face with such a life as yours to give an account for."

Arthur was cowed. The doctor had often warned him, but never in such words as these. He could forget both time and eternity when the bottle was going round and he was among his friends—save the mark—and his brain was whirling with the excitement of drink and profligacy; but to be told quietly and firmly, as he lay there in his own bed under his father's roof, with no drink to madden him, no seven devils worse than himself to tear him away from thought, no vision before him but the panorama of his own hideous past, to be told then, and to feel himself that the hand of death was creeping on him, and that one finger had already touched him, this came home to him, and caused him to feel a strange cold shrinking.

" You don't make a fellow feel very cheerful, doctor," he said, after a pause, " but what's the odds ! I suppose I'm not the only chap who's gone to the devil ; and, perhaps, the devil is not such a bad sort as the parsons make out."

He said it, or rather tried to say it, in a light and easy way ; not rudely, for he was never rude to anybody, whether drunk or sober, but in a way to show that he was not frightened, and, on the contrary, as he would have put it, game. But the words sounded as hollow as a coffin, and the attempt at bravado was a dismal failure. That cold finger was upon him, and he felt it to his very marrow.

The doctor told his mother of Arthur's condition, that he must be regarded as really ill, and watched accordingly. Though she was anxious, a secret joy rose within her mother's heart. This illness must keep Arthur at home, it must bring him under her influence ; it must keep his sinful life clean and separate him from his horrible companions. It must do that ; and it might—it might—be a turning-point in his life.

She nursed and tended him devotedly, and he was so grateful, so humbly thankful for everything done for him ; so considerate and tender to her and to his father, so different in his time of weakness from the son they had mourned over, that her hopes for him grew daily, and she was happier in her mind about this—her only child—than she had been for years ; and Mr. Ferguson, if not sanguine, because he was an experienced man of the world, would not, for any consideration, have said anything to dash her hopes. He feared much what would happen when his son recovered, but even he hoped a little.

Arthur grew steadily better, and the symptoms that had

alarmed the doctor slowly passed away. And as his strength came back, the doctor's warning began to grow dim—the peace and restfulness of home, and of a mother's care, began to cloy ; and then there came a craving for drink, and for the kind of companionship to which he had given his life. And then one day, when convalescent, he went out, as he said, for a little walk, gaily promising his anxious mother to be back in an hour ; but he did not come in an hour, or a day, or a week ; and when he did come, it was in the small hours of the morning, and Warner had to carry him upstairs. And then his father and mother gave up all hope.

It was just at this time that Alice Lennox arrived on a long visit ; and Mr. Ferguson rejoiced to know that his wife would have her companionship, as it would give her some distraction from her own sad thoughts. Alice was the only daughter of a first cousin of Mrs. Ferguson. Her mother had died many years ago, and she had since then been the devoted companion of her father, of whom she had taken such entire charge that he called her his little mother. Now, not long since, he had died in India, where she had been with him at the time, as, indeed, she had been in all places whither he went on business or pleasure. He had been able to leave her a sufficient provision to make her comfortable in means, but not wealthy, and she had returned to England to make her own life under the new conditions. She was about thirty years old and unmarried—not unmarried for want of suitors, but because nothing would induce her to leave her father, or interfere with her whole-souled devotion to him. She was not what would be called a pretty woman, and yet no one looked at her once who

did not want to look a second time. She was tall and shapely for one thing. For another thing, she had a wealth of auburn hair, and a pair of very expressive grey eyes—eyes that had a calm, steady look in them. Her forehead was lofty—too lofty for accepted views of feminine beauty, the nose well shaped and her mouth, though small, had a very decided look about it. The chin also was rather masculine, perhaps, in its firm outline. The effect she produced as a whole was that of a woman who had a mind ; who knew what she wanted, and why she wanted it, and meant to have it ; whose ideas of duty would be of the highest, who would be a true and steady friend, who would hate meanness and despise vice in every form, and would not be very tolerant of empty-headed men and silly women ; and yet was far, very far, from being that unspeakably terrible product of modern times—a woman who wants to be thought a man, and tries to dress and act the part. She was only a highly-cultivated type of a very good and sensible woman, and withal very pleasant to look upon.

She had always kept up a correspondence with Mrs. Ferguson, to whom she had been greatly attached since childhood, though she had been little in England since then ; and the Fergusons' house was opened to her immediately after her father's death, with a warm and earnest request that she would make it her home until her own plans were finally settled, and the longer the better.

When she had last seen Arthur, who was two or three years older than herself, he was a big schoolboy, with charming manners, and the soul of easy good-nature. What he had become since she had more or less read between the lines of Mrs. Ferguson's letters, whose refer-

ences to him had been very sad, but very restrained. What he was now she saw for herself on the occasion of his first return home after the break-out which I have just described ; for she had actually arrived in the interval between his leaving home that time and coming back again.

He had been told of her coming visit, but it did not interest him. Why should it, considering the chosen company that constituted his society ? He hardly remembered her indeed.

The first meeting took place on the stairs as he was coming down late on the afternoon following this last disgraceful return to his father's house. Strange to say, the alarming symptoms had not returned this time in spite of the life he had been leading during the last few days, probably because of the medical and nursing skill bestowed on him during his unusually long stay at home ; and after a long sleep (if the time occupied in becoming sober could be called sleep), and a restoration of decent apparel, always kept at home for him, and other measures in which Warner had only too good reason to be proficient, he looked quite presentable. But his eyes were bloodshot—young though he still was, there were puffy, unhealthy swellings under them ; his face told many chapters of the story of his life, and was in colour not so much pale as ashen-grey ; and his movements had about them the trembling uncertainty and want of control seen only in very old people and in habitual drunkards. Such was Arthur Ferguson as he came upon Alice Lennox.

She had conceived for him an intense aversion and a profound contempt. His mode of life and the effect it

had upon his parents had soon become known to her fully, even during the short time she had been in the house, for conversation with the poor mother had speedily filled in the outlines that had been gathered from her letters. Her sense of duty to parents was, as she had shown in her own life, immensely strong, and she detested this man who had caused such sorrow to his father and mother, and despised him unspeakably for his low and vicious life.

These feelings were so strong upon her when they met face to face, that she could hardly contain herself or speak civilly to him, though she felt that in his father's house she could not choose but do so.

When he saw her a little colour—perhaps the ghost of a feeling of shame—came into his face. He would have avoided her if he could, but that was impossible, and so in the gracious manner that never forsook him he held out his tremulous hand and said, “Miss Lennox, I believe. I heard you were coming, and am so glad for my mother's sake” (the words “for my mother's sake” flashed through Alice Lennox's mind with bitter scorn as she thought of what he might have done for his mother's sake, and how he had broken her heart instead), “as she will like to have you with her so much. I believe we are some sort of cousins, aren't we?”

“I believe we are,” she answered as civilly as she could, but with decided curttness, and she swept past him without more.

He looked up the stairs after her, as if he would have wished to see her again, then stood for a minute irresolutely, and then shrugged his shoulders and went down, saying to himself audibly, “Rather curious looking woman,

but nice face all the same. Didn't seem very sweet on me. Don't see why she should be; I'm not very sweet on her." And then he laughed in a foolish way, as if the soddened brain had half-developed the idea that he had said something funny.

CHAPTER II

ARTHUR kept his room a good deal for the next day or two, and Alice Lennox did not see him, to her great relief. Then he disappeared once again, and Alice saw a cloud on the faces of Mr. and Mrs. Ferguson that told her something of what they were enduring, and made her feeling towards Arthur grow into positive loathing.

He did not return for several weeks, and they only knew of his existence because of pressing applications for money that came to his father's chambers in the Temple, generally brought by dirty, disreputable messengers, armed with a scrawl from Arthur, whose writing on these occasions was only just recognisable. Painful and embarrassing as it was to Mr. Ferguson to receive such embassies at his chambers, he had made it clearly understood that no application from Arthur for money sent to his house would receive attention, and indeed he had threatened in terms, than even Arthur had understood, that if he ever worried his mother in that way his allowance would be cut off altogether. That form of annoyance and grief at least Mr. Ferguson was determined to save her.

But at last he did come back, and this time not in a cab, but carried on a stretcher. He had been found by a policeman lying on the pavement of a low street in the

purlieus of Soho, with a crowd round him, some of whom at least would have rifled his pockets as he lay there if there had been anything in them, but his friends had seen to that department before they left him. He was evidently very ill as well as very drunk, and seemed to have sustained some hurt, probably in his fall, as he was groaning heavily. Assistance was obtained, and he was about to be taken to a hospital when he regained just enough consciousness to give his father's address, and beg to be taken there, and although the police were incredulous at first when he mentioned the address, something in his voice and manner of speech told them that he was what they called a "gent," and they took him there accordingly.

It was in the early hours of the morning, and Warner, who slept downstairs, heard the ring, and knew at once what it meant. He opened the front door stealthily in the hope of getting Arthur quietly to his room, but he soon found that matters were serious, and was obliged to get the policemen to take their burden upstairs into Arthur's room and to rouse another servant to rush off and summon the doctor, while he got rid of the police and stayed with Arthur. The tramp of the men and Arthur's deep groans speedily roused Mr. and Mrs. Ferguson, and indeed the whole household, and Mr. Ferguson hastily dressed and went to Arthur's room, while Alice Lennox at his request went to his wife to try and calm her until the doctor came and it was known what was really the matter.

The doctor's verdict was that there were three ribs broken, other less serious bodily injuries, and a severe recurrence of the paralytic symptoms that had alarmed

him before. So Arthur had once more come home to stay, and once more his mother regained possession of him.

A long and very anxious illness followed, and except for absolutely necessary aid his mother insisted on bearing the burden of nursing Arthur, in spite of all the entreaties of her husband and of Alice Lennox, and even of the doctor. Poor soul, I think she felt that it was only when he was brought thus low and helpless, and cut off by necessity from the foul and noxious surroundings of his ordinary life, that her lost boy came back to her, and she clung to this brief opportunity, almost happy in gaining it, and yet infinitely sad in the certain belief that if he recovered he would turn from her again. She clung to it the more because now, as always, his graceful, winning ways and words went right to her heart, though whether they came from his was quite another matter.

Unable to prevent Arthur's mother from undertaking a task that might well be beyond her strength, Alice Lennox, who was a most capable nurse, and whose strong, calm nature was a great source of strength and comfort to Mrs. Ferguson at such a time, determined to save her in every way that was possible. With a fine instinct she carefully avoided even seeming to take the burden upon herself, or to stand between the mother and her still loved son. What she did was in a hundred little ways to save Mrs. Ferguson from fatigue, and relieve her without seeming to do so or ever obtruding herself. And hence it came to pass that very quietly and naturally she too came to be a good deal about the sick-room.

Arthur was too ill and suffering at first to notice much

who was about him, but when his splendid constitution began to assert itself, and he gradually mended, he became very conscious indeed of her presence, and his eyes often followed her as she moved about in her quiet, composed way. Oddly enough, she attracted him and frightened him at the same time. He seemed to shrink before her and become conscious of the contempt that she must feel for him. He tried to talk to her, but she always discouraged it, and showed an obvious disinclination to speak to him or be spoken to by him.

One day when he was beginning to pull round he thanked her for taking so much trouble about him. She answered quietly, but very emphatically, "What little I am able to do I do gladly for the sake of your mother, who sadly over-taxes herself, and makes us very anxious for her."

It is known that Beelzebub himself when ill is wont to exhibit amiable and even saintly qualities, and no credit need be claimed for Arthur because this observation made him feel, as it did, two things. First, it brought home to him, in a way that genuinely touched him, his mother's unfailing devotion, which he had acknowledged to her indeed in his pleasant, easy way, but without any deep consciousness of feeling. And secondly, he was aware that Alice Lennox very pointedly disclaimed any desire to render help to him for his own sake, and this made him feel, as he found himself always doing in her presence, a very despicable being. As she left the room he turned his face towards the wall, and he thought what a low, disreputable brute he was, and how shamefully he had acted to the best of parents. It was a perfectly true reflection, but it was novel to him to look at matters in that light.

When his mother came in shortly afterwards he held out his thin hand to her, and said, to her overwhelming surprise, "Mother, you're looking dreadfully tired and worn, and it all comes from nursing me. You mustn't do it, dear. I'm not worth it, and not fit to cause you a moment's thought."

Her tears came fast, and she could not speak at first, but at last she sobbed out, "Oh, my dear, how I wish your poor father could have heard you say that." And then she left the room hurriedly, so as not to agitate him, and when Alice Lennox went to find her not long afterwards in her own room, the poor, heart-broken mother, to whom a faint ray of hope had come, was on her knees, praying through her blinding tears that her only child might yet be spared to be won back to her, cleansed and purified. And Alice put her firm arms round her, and looked into her face with those calm, quiet eyes of hers, full of loving sympathy, and brought comfort to the sorely troubled heart.

It was noticeable that from that day Arthur tried in every way to spare his mother trouble on his account. He insisted on her taking long spells of rest, and in various little ways showed new-born solicitude. He even spoke to his father, and begged him to use his authority to prevent his mother from overdoing herself. It was the first sign he had ever shown for all these years of real consideration for her, and the strange thing was, that it all flowed from that one sentence of Alice Lennox, which had hit him like a blow.

Her influence on him was at work in quite another direction. Her quiet, steady face grew upon him as he

lay there in bed. He found himself contrasting it with the faces of those among whom he had cast in his evil lot, and shrinking with horror from the comparison. Though he always had that feeling of shame in her presence, he also found himself looking forward to her coming into the room, and was conscious of a sense of void when she left it. He found that, as he grew better, he thought more and more about her, and less and less of the companions whom at other times he would have been restless to rejoin, less and less eager for the life that was waiting for him. Even the craving for drink, though that came upon him at intervals now, seemed less powerful to him than the wish not to disgrace himself in her sight. His anxious parents watched in fear and trembling the approach of convalescence, but no sign appeared at present of his being eager to escape from home, and when he was well enough to be in the air he always, to her unspeakable joy, asked his mother to drive with him. He more than once hinted strongly to her that a drive would also be good for Alice Lennox, who had been so much in the house during his illness; but Alice always excused herself, knowing full well what a delight it was to Mrs. Ferguson to have Arthur to herself, and also seeking to avoid him as much as possible, because she had a just but pitiless feeling of resentment towards him on account of the suffering he had caused his parents, and his degraded life.

“Mother,” said Arthur one day during a drive, “I have not seen Coates for years. I wonder if I could go there?”

Coates was the name of Mr. Ferguson’s country house, which was in a lovely part of Surrey. Mrs. Ferguson’s heart stood still with fear that this might mean the first

symptom of restlessness that would end in taking Arthur anywhere except to Coates, but her face brightened when he went on, "Of course I shouldn't care to go unless you came too, and Alice Lennox would like the place I am sure if you took her too, and she would be a companion to you."

This wish of his to return for a while to the quiet country house in which much of his boyhood had been passed, to return too with her as an indispensable companion, brought joy to his mother's heart, and she answered that she felt quite sure his father would spare her to go with him. As for Alice Lennox, his mother was not certain whether she would care to come or whether she would rather pay another visit in London while Mrs. Ferguson was away with Arthur; but she would ask her, "Or," she added, "why not ask her yourself, Arthur?"

"I think you had better do so, mother," he said in a slow, hesitating tone, "I don't think she would care much to come for any request of mine. She has not much reason to think well of me, you see."

His mother's eyes grew sad. She understood his meaning, but she did not understand, she did not even guess, what lay behind it in his heart—a yearning unspeakable that Alice Lennox should think well of him, a deadly fear that she never could or would regard him with anything but contempt and loathing. His sin was just beginning to find him out. It always does, and there is no preacher so shallow, so misguided, so utterly wide of the mark, as he who puts all his force into depicting in lurid terms the punishment of sin as lying beyond the grave, and passes by with scanty mention, or none at all, the bitter retribution that follows evil doing in this present life, sometimes

slowly, sometimes quickly, but always surely. It is an eternal verity that the way of transgressors is hard. For the pure love of a good woman had come into his heart, and as he felt, and knew, and told himself it was too late—too late!

Most readily did Mr. Ferguson agree to the proposal. Even he began once again to have a glimmering of hope for his wretched son, and at least he would close no door through which the prodigal might return at last. As for Alice Lennox, she hesitated between aversion from the idea of the closer intercourse with Arthur that would be inevitable in a quiet country house and a strong feeling of loyalty to his mother, a feeling that somehow caused her to look upon the act of backing out as if she were deserting the ship; her presence might, she thought, also possibly have some kind of restraining influence for good on Arthur—she hardly knew how or why, and for his mother's sake she could not bring herself to withdraw from her that aid. So she ultimately decided to go.

Coates was a very quaint, old country house, and around it were wild commons, and shady lanes, and beauties innumerable. I would that I could describe them, but I cannot. Alas for the limitations of a brick-and-mortar life! When I see a tree or flower I don't know its name, and if told it to-day I forget it to-morrow. When I hear a bird sing I don't know what bird it is or why it is singing—whether its trill denotes joy consequent on the capture of an unusually large slug, or an interesting event in the family, or the advent of spring, or indecent triumph over the bird in the next tree because it can't sing so well. The book is closed to me, and the only work of nature

about which I have ever been really eloquent was a mosquito that once spent the night in my company. I knew his inmost thoughts by the time we parted, and he knew what it was to be pasted to the wall by a flying shot with the slipper of a desperate man. So I can only say that the country round Coates was very beautiful.

As Arthur wandered about, feeble still but perceptibly gaining strength, and beginning to look as he had not looked for many a long day before, chords were touched in him that had long been dormant. Every corner brought back some memory of his boyhood—expeditions here and there, favourite trees for climbing, sports lawful and unlawful, high spirits, rude health, innocent companions. And between then and now—what a scene of desolation and ruin, what ashes in the mouth, what unavailing regrets, what a hopeless barrier between him and anything pure and undefiled, between him and the respect and love of such a woman as Alice Lennox!

One morning he had strolled into the garden and he came upon her unawares. She was sitting on a bench reading. He sat beside her, and as he did so it seemed to him that she shrank away, as if fearful that his near presence might contaminate her. It might have been a morbid fancy, for he did not attempt to sit close to her. A fine view of hill and dale, and common carpeted with purple heather, lay stretched before them, and he looked at it for a minute without speaking, and then he said—

“ It is a pretty, peaceful spot, isn’t it, Miss Lennox ? ”

“ Very.”

“ It does one good somehow to look at it—makes one feel better in spirit as well as in body.”

She said nothing.

And then a thought came into his mind, and it seemed to carry him right away so that he was forced to utter it, and yet hardly realised what he was saying—

“If such an influence as that can move even such a man as I am, what might it not be to me if another influence came into my life—the influence of loving a good, pure, high-minded woman such as you are, and having her respect and love in return.”

Alice Lennox rose. She coloured deeply for a moment, for it was impossible not to see that his words meant a declaration of love for her. Then she turned upon him, almost fiercely, with flashing eyes, and the pent-up scorn and contempt that she had been smothering for his mother’s sake, and because she was his father’s guest, burst out in a torrent that she could not stem.

“Influence, Mr. Ferguson ! What good influence has been wanting that could have failed to make you lead a reputable life, if you had not deliberately chosen degradation in its lowest forms for yourself? What influence should have been greater than that of the father and mother whose hearts you have broken, whose lives you have ruined, whose house you have disgraced and desolated, whose forgiveness and infinite long-suffering you have traded on? What would be the life of such a woman as you are now pleased to fancy might alter your life if you were linked to hers—what would be her sufferings, her shame, her sorrows, on your account? What love can weigh a feather in the scale to influence such a life as yours, when a mother’s unceasing devotion is brushed aside and trampled on? Shame on you to talk of a woman’s influence, when

you have given such deadly proof of its powerlessness to lead you one inch away from your unspeakably evil ways and works!"

She paused, and added hurriedly, "I ought not perhaps to have said this, but I could not help it. Your mother's wrongs have made me so indignant, that I could not listen to what you just said without speaking my mind." And then she left him.

He sat there feeling as if every word she had said had been the thong of a whip with which he had been mercilessly scourged, as indeed he had been if words can sting, or cut, or bruise.

But at length it came to pass that out of the chaos of humiliation, shame, and despair, but not resentment, that surged in his troubled mind, a resolution was formed of which more was heard presently.

When he met Alice Lennox later there was an odd reversal of their former relative positions. He in order to spare his mother any unhappiness (he thought much of that now), and because Alice Lennox was a guest, and because his instincts of manner were always those of a gentleman, was courteous and quite easy in his manner to her; she, on the other hand, had lost her earlier quiet way of half showing and half not showing that his presence was only tolerated by her. She was nervous and ill at ease, and much more demonstrative of civility to him than she had been before. It was not that she was ashamed of what she had said or had any pity for him; but she was secretly afraid lest his mother should come to know of it, and be unhappy because he was unhappy, and perhaps very naturally think she had acted unkindly. Worse still, she

thought it possible that her unsparing words might have helped to drive him to despair, and by that road back into his old way of life, and for that she would have been unaffectedly grieved for his parents, and even a little sorry for him. She had therefore upon her a half-guilty feeling, and it made her uncomfortable and nervous and a little self-reproachful.

But her fears were groundless. He continued to be as he had been ever since his illness, most attentive to his mother, and to make her happier than she had been since his childhood; and while he did not throw himself in Alice's way, he did not avoid her, nor did he give the slightest sign of falling back into the old ways. He was only very quiet and subdued, and the glimpses of a flow of naturally high spirits that had come out at times when his recovery advanced were no longer seen.

CHAPTER III

THE air, the exercise, above all the changed life he was leading, gradually brought Arthur back not to perfect health, for nature would not agree to that after being defied so long, but a condition not far removed from it. And by the time that stage came Mrs. Ferguson was anxious to return to town on her husband's account. Her son's future was naturally very much in her mind, and she was conscious that London would offer temptations to him that he might not be able to resist; but there was no help for that, and she could hope that all might be well as she saw him so greatly changed. It fell out therefore that the day of their return was fixed.

But before they left Coates, only the day before in fact, Arthur sought the chance of one more interview with Alice Lennox, and he found her as before in the garden. There was the same change between them when he spoke to her as there had been in their daily relations since she had denounced him to his face. He was full of steady purpose, and she almost timid this time.

“Miss Lennox,” he said very quietly, “I want to say a few words to you—none that you need be afraid of,” he added, as she instinctively made a gesture of retreating from him. “Not many weeks ago you told me what you thought of me in words that were strong, but not too strong, and absolutely just and true. I did not resent them at the time, whatever else I may have felt, and I hope I have not shown since the slightest sign of a resentment that would have been ungenerous and mean. Can you grant me just that very little?”

He paused a moment, and she said in a low voice, “I can indeed.”

“Not resenting them then, I want to thank you for them now, because they taught me a lesson that I might never have learnt otherwise. They taught me that a man who has been what I have been has no right even to dream of linking his soiled name and fame with that of a pure, good, innocent woman; that he has by his own act created a gulf that must separate him from such a woman as if he were a leper; and that mere lip professions of resolutions to lead a new life, or of belief that she can influence him to do so, rightly and justly count for nothing in the feeling with which she must and should regard him. The seal of vice has been set on his forehead, and he is something to

be despised and shunned. All that you taught me, but if the lesson had stopped there I might have merely sunk into despair, perhaps a worse condition. It did not. The thought came to me that no past life can be too bad to be retrieved, not by mere emotional resolutions, or even by loving a good woman, but by acts, and that a path still lies before me which, if I can but climb it, will bring back my self-respect, and enable me to lift up my head again even in the presence of such as you are. Do not misunderstand me. I cling to no illusions now, and I will not insult you by referring in the most distant way to a monstrous hope that I had allowed myself to cherish. I know and realise to the full what you think of me, and what you are justified in thinking of me, and that the feeling will never alter, and I accept that as part of a richly deserved punishment. I have only said what I have now, because I have fancied sometimes since that you thought you had been perhaps just a little hard, and I wanted to assure you most truly and sincerely that every word you said rang true to my very soul, and was not perhaps said quite in vain, even to me."

He bowed his head, and was about to leave her, when she held out her hand to him, and said in a voice that was not at all steady like his own, "Thank you ever so much for saying what you have. I—I—did not mean to be so hard, and you are very generous." He took the hand she offered, and bending down he kissed it, but she instinctively knew it was not the kiss of one who hoped to win her love, but of one who was surrendering all hope of doing so.

He left her thus, and did not afterwards attempt to refer

to the subject again. And she—what was she thinking and feeling herself? Who shall tell? She was a woman.

Immediately Arthur returned to London he had a long and very earnest conversation with his father, and before many days it became known that he was going out to New Zealand, where his father had a distant connection, who had settled there as a farmer, and to whom and to his wife Mr. Ferguson had shown much kindness during their rare trips to the mother country. He knew them to be thoroughly reliable, and he wrote fully to them, explaining to them only as much of the past as Arthur insisted on their knowing, so that, as he put it, he might not go to them under false pretences, and proposing terms which he was sure they would gladly accept for receiving Arthur with a general idea of his learning farming, and he arranged for a reply by cable, feeling, as he wisely did, that the sooner Arthur was right away from London the better. The expected answer came, and Arthur started almost immediately afterwards.

I do not attempt to record what passed between the parents and the son who had come back into their aching hearts, and come back, too, humble-minded and anxious to retrieve the evil days gone by, and to win, not their forgiveness, for he had that already, and it had never failed him, but their respect. It was a hard parting, and his mother even more than his father felt it bitterly. But she knew it was for the best, and she bore it for his dear sake. Alice Lennox was again a great comfort to her, and there was only this difference, that whereas in the time of Arthur's illness she had often dried the poor mother's tears, but shed none herself, now they cried together. It can have been

only out of sympathy for Mrs. Ferguson, of course, but it was shown in a different way.

Arthur had said good-bye to her quite naturally and steadily, and begged her to be as much as possible with his mother, "For," he said, "she has come to rely on you so much, and your calm, strong way of looking at things is so comforting to her." She promised that she would, and when he had just shaken hands with her, and said, "Good-bye, and God bless you,"—he did not even kiss her hand this time—she showed her calm, strong way of looking at things rather oddly by going to her own room and crying as if her heart would break. You see Alice Lennox was, as I said before, a woman.

Afterwards Mr. and Mrs. Ferguson had no interest or pleasure in life so great as that of reading Arthur's letters from the far-off country. They were delightful letters to read—full of life, modest, manly, cheerful, and, above all, telling them, not boastingly, but with deep, humble thankfulness, that the old craving for drink had been entirely conquered, and that he was working and living to bring home a good name to them. But that was not the only pleasure, for Mr. Ferguson's relatives wrote home confidential letters about Arthur that filled his parents with joy and thankfulness. They could not say enough that was good of him. There was nothing he could not do, nothing he would not do; no duty that he ever neglected, no kind service that he was not eager to render to anybody and everybody. He was the life and soul of the place, adored by everybody, and looking splendid in health.

Three years passed away, and then Mr. Ferguson felt it was time for Arthur to be taking up a more important

position in life, and letters were written containing suggestions to him as to whether he would like to go in for farming on his own account, for which purpose his father would gladly provide capital ; and one day Mrs. Ferguson said to her husband, “ Arthur has been gone three years and twenty-three days, dear, hasn’t he ? ”

“ About that time, but I could not swear to the odd days. It needs a mother to count them.” He looked at her very tenderly as he added that.

“ You’re very anxious to arrange something more permanent for him, aren’t you, James ? ”

“ Indeed I am.”

“ Isn’t it very difficult to do a thing like that by letter at such a long distance ? ”

Mr. Ferguson looked at his wife for a moment with surprise, and then he understood all that her words implied, for she was trembling a little, and tears stood in her eyes. He went round to her and put his arm on her shoulder.

“ Is the time so very long, my dear ? ”

“ Yes, James, dear, it is a little long—and they say he looks so well and handsome ; and we’re growing old, dear, aren’t we ? ”

The next mail carried out a letter to Arthur from his father expressing an anxious wish that he should come home if only for a short trip, so that they might talk matters over and see what was best to be done. He told him also that his mother was pining to see him, and added, “ And I shall be glad to shake your hand too, my dear son, and tell you with my own lips that I am proud of you.”

Alice Lennox, who had been much with them during Arthur’s absence, was staying in the house at the time.

She possessed their entire confidence, and her devotion to them had amply redeemed her promise to Arthur. The letter to him was shown to her before it was closed up, and after she had read it, and had said in a shy sort of way very unusual to her that it was a very nice letter, she went into her own room and cried as she had done on another occasion. But there are tears and tears, and these tears were not of the same kind as the other tears, but quite sparkling, and, in fact, an entirely different prescription labelled, "To be used externally in cases of great joy."

Her looks were not of a kind to fade fast, and she had altered very little indeed during those three years. In fact, after the letter had been sent to Arthur she seemed to grow younger, and there was a brightness in her eye, and a lightness in her step, and a gaiety in her voice that Mr. and Mrs. Ferguson both remarked on, but they did not connect the effect with what we may be allowed to suspect was the cause, for their thoughts were absorbed in Arthur's return.

What preparations were made for that event. The killing of the fatted calf paled before them. The carpet in Mr. Arthur's room was discovered to be shabby, though no one had ever noticed the circumstance before, and gave way ignominiously to a new one. Twenty times a day his mother went into that room with a hushed step, as if it were a sacred temple, to devise some little new comfort, or put something straight, or have something taken out to be aired for the fourth time. Mr. Arthur would be sure to ask for this if it wasn't there all ready to his hand, or didn't Warner remember how fond he always was of that. Of course he would require a good supply of shirts and other indispensable articles of apparel, and so a haberdasher's

shop was raked fore and aft to provide them, the dear soul forgetting that she had sent out enough consignments of similar articles to set him up for years. Warner himself took the fever, and actually asked for a new suit of livery six months before the usual time, because he wanted to do credit to his appearance when he opened the door to Mr. Arthur.

His father went to meet him as he landed, but the mother could not trust herself to do that, and stayed behind with Alice to receive him at the house. How slowly the time went on at the last, and how the clocks and watches were looked at and compared with each other, and those that were a little fast declared to be right.

When the supreme hour actually arrived Alice quietly slipped away. She felt instinctively that it was fitting for Arthur's mother to have him all to herself at that first moment. I think too that she was a little agitated, and I might even say shy, of facing Arthur for the first time after his long absence.

The sound of wheels at last—not like the fifty unsympathetic mocking wheels that had come within hearing before and pretended that they were going to stop at the door, but had gone past it without so much as saying they were sorry, but the wheels of a cab that carried Mr. Ferguson and Arthur, and did stop there. A knock, a ring, the front door flying open, Warner on the doorstep resplendent in his new livery; and in the hall, with beating, grateful heart, with radiant face, the mother who had loved her boy through evil report and good report, and whom he took tenderly in his arms now and kissed and blessed. And as she gazed into his handsome face and saw how

splendid he looked, and realised instantly that the bright, joyous nature of his earliest days had come back again to him, controlled and governed now by the steady resolution of a man who has been through the fire and conquered it, she laid her loving head against his breast and whispered to him, "Oh, Arthur, my son, my dear son, weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."

They had been together—father, mother, and son—for some time, before Mr. Ferguson suddenly realised that Alice Lennox was not with them, and asked for her.

"Dear Alice, she is in the house somewhere, James; but I expect she thought we should like to have a little time together alone first. It would be just like her; she is so thoughtful, and has been such a blessing to me, Arthur. I cannot bear her to be away from us, and she has devoted a large share of her time to us since you went away."

Arthur looked grave and thoughtful. He did not think his mother had divined the true reason for her keeping out of the way. He thought it was the old shrinking from him, and although he had steeled himself to bear that, it struck into his heart with a chill. But he bravely put it away from him, for he would not have his parents see a cloud on his face for the world, at that of all moments.

Mrs. Ferguson went to fetch Alice, and they returned together. She looked at him for a moment, and took in the immense, the glorious alteration in him. He held out his hand to her, and said a few gracious words of thanks for all her care of his dear mother. She seemed embarrassed and nervous, and even Mrs. Ferguson noticed that she was unlike her usual calm self.

"Why, Alice dear, here have you been trying all these

last few weeks to keep me calm and patient when I was waiting for this dear boy of mine, and now you seem, I declare, to be quite excited yourself. Wonders will never cease."

That little speech, made in all innocence, did not mend matters, for it only made Alice colour deeply, and she was grateful to Arthur when he broke an awkward pause by asking questions about people and things that interested him, and turning the conversation into other channels. She took little part in it, and it did not escape him that she soon left the room.

He put it all down to the same cause, and as he was dressing for dinner that evening he communed with himself—

"I knew it must be so. I have told myself so a thousand times when I was far away, and my thoughts would dwell upon her in spite of myself. She put me beyond the pale once and for ever, and was perfectly right to do it, and, I am the same object of aversion to her now as I was then, and always shall be. Still, the actual reality is a bitter pill to swallow. Arthur Ferguson, my man, you have two things to do, and you've just got to do them whether you like it or not. One is, that you must never let one glum look come into your face that your father and mother can see at all, still less associate with its true reason. And another is, that you must brace yourself to say a few words to Alice Lennox, just to make *her* understand that *you* understand, and try to prevent her from feeling at all awkward when you are about."

The first of these resolves he kept steadily in view that evening right up to the time—which was late—when his

father parted from him after a long talk and smoke together. "God bless you, my dear son," he said as he turned to go to his room, and the words were music indeed in Arthur's ears.

The second he determined to put into execution next day, and the chance came in his way, for he found Alice alone after lunch while his mother was preparing to go out with him. She rose rather hurriedly as if to go, but he put his hand up in a deprecating way. "Don't go for a minute, Miss Lennox," he said in a voice that was fairly under control, but not quite so much so as he wanted it to be. She sat down, and he saw that she was trembling, and it distressed him. "I am not going to say anything that I think will be painful to you; indeed I am not," he said pleadingly. "I only wanted just to tell you that I quite understand you feel just the same about me, and that I am not the least hurt or resentful that it is so. I know only too well with what good reason you formed the opinion of me that you did, and I have been home long enough already to see that it has not changed, and never can change."

He saw it indeed, did he? Was Arthur a bat, or a mole, or only as blind and fatuous as most men are where a woman is concerned?

"I wanted also to tell you how deeply grateful I am still, and always shall be, for what you said to me, which changed the whole current of my life, and to bless you for your devotion to my dear mother. Sometimes, when far away, I have thought that if you could have seen the change in me you might have forgiven me for all the trouble I brought on my dear father and mother in the old days, and for the words that you rebuked so justly, and that, while you could never

care for me or respect me, you would at least not feel that my presence was hateful to you. If you could bring yourself so far as that now, I should be very grateful; but I do not ask it, or expect it, nor will I ever subject you to the slightest importunity or embarrassment on my account. Oh! Miss Lennox, what is it—what have I said to distress you?"

For just as he had finished what he had summoned all his courage to say, Alice broke down completely, and there she was before him sobbing bitterly.

For a few moments he stood in utter distress and helplessness, as he asked himself what he had said that could have so overcome her like this. And then a light as from the sky broke upon him. The bat saw the sun shining for the first time. The mole put his head out of the ground, and got upon his own personally constructed hill and looked at the surrounding scenery. The blundering animal called man for once in a way divined the secret of a woman's heart. In another moment Arthur was bending over her, and he drew her hands away from the dear face that they sought to hide, and looked into it and saw there all that was needed to make the earth and all that therein was beautiful for him. "Alice! Alice, my darling, whom I loved when I went away and have loved every minute since—is it possible that you care for me—even for me, my dearest—even for me?"

She smiled through her tears.

"Of course it is, you silly old Arthur! I have cared for you ever since you went away, and should have gone on caring if you had not come back for ten years."

Arthur did not return to New Zealand. He went in for extensive farming in the neighbourhood of Coates, which house was made over to him by his father as a wedding-gift.

AN OFFICE DINNER

IN some legal firms the office dinner is an annual institution. In others, such a festival takes place only when a new partner joins the firm, or a member of the firm takes unto himself a partner of the other sex under that species of contract which cannot be made for a limited term of years, or lay down any clear rule as to the proportions in which profits and losses are to be shared, or ensure a permanent continuance of goodwill. The particular office dinner which I am about to describe was given many years ago, upon the occasion of two new partners coming into a firm to which the present writer was then articled. These two heroes were themselves the hosts of the evening, and the dinner took place at an establishment in the city of London, which no longer exists, being now a bank or an insurance office, or some other like institution, and on the daily menu card is now inscribed no dish, except money—money hot, cold, roast, boiled, stewed, fried, baked, or cooked in any other way according to fancy—but always and only money.

We sat down to dinner, a party of about twenty-four, and had scarcely reached the stage of fish, when the junior office boy was led from the table with a countenance of which the predominant hue was pale green, and the subsequent proceedings interested him no more. It transpired that at

this very early period he had been beguiled into "taking wine" with his neighbours, and had been induced to believe that it was a breach of good manners not to drink off a full glass on every occasion. I doubt not he has grown wiser since, and at all events he has had plenty of time in which to do so.

There are those who think that justice is not always done in this world, but upon the occasion under notice I am able to declare that full justice was done to the dinner, and that a sense of gratified repletion was to be traced in every countenance when a prodigious number of courses had been disposed of, and we settled down with a hush of expectancy to the serious business of the evening.

Mr. Holditch, one of the two new partners, announced to us immediately after dinner that we might smoke. We did smoke. I did smoke. At least I began to smoke, and only left off when I realised that to go on was to court defeat, if not disaster. Do not think too hardly of me for this confession, as I was articled very early, and was only in my second year. You were not always a demon with tobacco yourself, dear reader—I was just going to say dear reader of my own sex, when I remembered that the monopoly has been done away with.

Then the other new partner, Mr. Scales, said there were to be no speeches, and called rather nervously upon one of the copying clerks for a song, as one who sought to avert a crisis. But the device was in vain, for the copying clerk only blushed and looked hard at Davies, the cashier, who was the doyen of the staff, having been with the firm many years, though he was still a bachelor, and inclined to be sentimental and florid in his language when not drawing

cheques or casting up. All the rest of us looked at Davies too, it having been well understood that he was to propose the health of the two partners, and Davies rose with the air of one who discharges a great mission. It may seem strange that at this distance of time I can recall his words, but the fact is that Davies was partial to me and had given me several private rehearsals. Indeed, he had gone so far as to accept a few ideas from me.

“Mr. Holditch and Mr. Scales, gentlemen. Before Mr. Sanderson warbles to us, I must beg to be permitted, as an old servant of the firm, to give vent to the sentiments which animate all our breasts” (I had suggested “bosoms,” but Davies said he thought “breasts” had a more manly ring about it), “on this happy occasion, and to propose your healths, jointly and severally” (“jointly and severally” was mine, and I got the hint out of Williams’ “Real Property,” and feel bound to make this acknowledgment to the author). “Mr. Holditch, sir, you have for some years assisted to guide the destinies of the firm, and have won our esteem, our respect, may I say for self and fellow clerks, our warm affection. Mr. Scales, sir, you have passed in the office your period of articled clerkship, and if at times your ardent spirits” (I had told Davies that this sounded too much like gin, but he fancied the phrase) “have carried you away into innocent practical jests, such as making music with a comb wrapped up in paper in my room when I have been working out rather difficult accounts, why, sir, these merry moments have but endeared you to us. Nor do we forget that you are the son of the esteemed head of the firm, and that we hope and believe you will prove ‘a noble scion of a noble sire.’”

Davies believed firmly that that crowning point of his peroration came out of Shakespeare, but I never felt sure that he had got it quite right. Anyhow, though it was drowned in applause, no inquest was held upon it.

The toast was duly honoured, and the reply of Mr. Holditch was very modest and to the point. The reply of Mr. Scales was also very modest, but not quite so much to the point, for it has to be confessed that he had incautiously imbibed enough generous wine to obscure somewhat the keen edge of his intellect, to which must be added the fact that he was youthful and inexperienced in oratory.

According to my recollection he informed the company that his father was his father, and then declared that Mr. Davies had always been a father to him since he came to the office, and then described Mr. Holditch as being more than his father. After laying in this plentiful stock of male parents, he begged everybody's forgiveness for his past conduct without any obvious reason, and then passed into a quagmire of nouns, verbs, and other parts of speech having no marked connection with each other, finally declaring that he should never forget it as long as he lived.

This episode over harmony reigned for a time. The copying clerk originally called upon dived out of the room and returned with a song, of which the purport was that in all imaginable circumstances he would stand by his friend, who, in the course of the verses, got into terrible difficulties, financial and otherwise. This he sang with great spirit, assisted by a real live accompanist at the piano, and retired to his seat amid loud plaudits.

To him succeeded, in response to a loud call, the managing common law clerk, Mr. Briggs, who was not only a

noted comedian during office hours, but was more than suspected of being an occasional performer in a place of entertainment at Margate on Saturday evenings. Moreover, in conversations with me, he claimed to be familiarly acquainted in private life with stars of the London music halls to an extent that inspired me then with the deepest awe. I am inspired now with the belief that Briggs never told the truth except when making affidavits, and not always then.

Briggs felt that something out of the common was expected of him, and left the room for several minutes, while the hush of expectancy sat upon us. He returned, and shrieks of laughter rent the air when it was seen that he was in costume. He had endued himself in a scarlet hunting coat, a white bowler hat, trousers of an exaggerated check pattern, white shoes, a prodigious blue tie made up in a bow, and a double-breasted white waistcoat. He had also painted his nose red and floured his whiskers, for in those days there were whiskers in the land, as contemporary portraits will prove to the clean-shaved convict of to-day. The result was a little confusing and wanting in central idea, because Briggs looked, so to speak, bits of all sorts of possibly intended characters, but I feel sure the collection had been brought together with much care, and it really was in its way quite a museum of unabashed vulgarity. It is fair also to say that at that distant period of history, even the leading low comedians of the music halls, who were Briggs' heroes and guides, and, as he would have me believe, also his bosom friends, had very rude ideas of making up for stage purposes. I use the word *rude* in every sense in which it can be interpreted.

With the instinct of an artist Briggs stood quite still for a time, while the easily pleased company (no one more easily pleased than I, and alas, how difficult I am to please now!) took in his personal appearance in all its incongruous details, and laughter was interspersed with a ripple of free but admiring comments, in which latter the assistant common law clerk was conspicuous, as he obviously felt that this particular business was being attended to in his department. Then Briggs struck up a song, of which I remember the refrain was:—

“ You may 'it me, beat me, knock me down,
But you mustn't touch the gal.”

The motive of the song was that he, Briggs, had taken a young lady (the pronunciation “lidy” had not come into vogue then, and I am nothing if not accurate) to whom he was deeply, and, so far as could be judged from the evidence, honourably attached, to various places of entertainment, and had on each occasion had the misfortune to become involved in violent controversy with some other person or persons in the same audience. He represented himself as having acted gallantly in all these difficulties, and the keynote was his great anxiety that, whatever happened to him, Matilder should not suffer violence. There was a great deal of gag, which always led up to the refrain respectfully quoted above, and, as a curiosity, I give one specimen of what provoked shrieks of laughter at an office dinner in the middle of the Victorian Era, as nearly as I can remember it—

“ The next time I'd a holiday
I took out my Matilder ;
Says I we'll go unto the play ;
With joy the promise filled 'er ;

But while between two acts we sat
As quiet as two mice,
A clumsy brute upon 'er 'at
Upset a penny ice."

"Well, of course, this was more than flesh and blood could stand, for I'd given 'er the 'at myself, and it corst eighteen coppers without the feather, wich I bought separate from the poult er's shop round the corner, as 'e was plucking ostriches that day, and I ses I don't know wot you call yerself, but you aren't no gentleman, whereupon he gave me one in the left hoptic, and we got mixed ; but jest as I was gettin' the hupper 'and two or three pals of his set on me, and then Matilder she started screamin', and I saw stars enough to fill the firmamential globe with twinklers, but I 'it out for all I was worth, wich that evenin' was 'arf-a-crown, and wen I saw things goin' wery bad I jest managed to call out—

" You may 'it me, beat me, knock me down,
But you mustn't touch the gal."

It will be perceived that neither the hunting-coat nor any other article in his miscellaneous costume could be conscientiously connected in the remotest way with his song, but that mattered nothing to us, and the whole performance was received with rapture.

A pleasant surprise of quite a different kind was next in store. I may mention that for several days before the dinner mysterious sounds had occasionally been heard in a basement below the office wherein there was much store of papers and a strong-room. These sounds did not resemble the droning noise which is heard when one clerk, who is thinking of something else far away, reads out an

engrossment of a deed to another clerk who holds a draft of it, at which he occasionally gazes with lack-lustre eyes, and who is also thinking of something else farther away. On the contrary, they seemed to indicate music as widely distinguished from law. This phenomenon was also accompanied by a difficulty in finding certain clerks, for whose temporary absence other clerks gave reasons that were not convincing.

But now the murder came out, for at a given signal four junior members of the staff, composed of a shorthand writer, an assistant Chancery clerk, a copyist, and a Jack-of-all-work, disappeared from the table, and, returning with pieces of music in their hands, and conscious blushes on their cheeks, gave in great style, as a four-part glee, "Oh, who will o'er the Downs so Free."

The shorthand writer went perhaps a little too fast ; the copyist showed a tendency to follow too faithfully his next-door neighbour instead of sticking to his own notes ; the Jack-of-all-work trespassed on every other singer's words and notes by turns ; and the assistant Chancery clerk didn't seem to mind when the glee got into a tangle. If their respective occupations are analysed, however, for a moment it will be seen that these little blemishes can be traced to original causes without difficulty, and I could point out with regard to the assistant Chancery clerk that the Judicature Act had not then been passed, and that Chancery suits were not then disposed of in four weeks at a cost of two pounds ten shillings as between solicitor and client. We live in great times now, and ought to be very thankful. I hope we all are. I am. (*Note*.—I have it in contemplation to apply for an official post, and

humbly trust that the very proper spirit shown in the last few words may come under the notice of High Legal Quarters.)

So far I had been sitting in a position of great freedom and no responsibility, and after my little smoking episode my pleasure had been unalloyed. I had laughed loud and long, cracked jokes with various members of the staff, sung the chorus when there was one, and applauded on all possible occasions with the vigour and spirits of youth—where are they now?—where are they now, I ask?

But Mr. Holditch had got a rod in pickle for me that I little knew of. He was a quiet man, but he had withal a keen sense of humour, and he thought that a little impromptu entertainment might be afforded by me, by which I mean at my expense. With a twinkle in his eye he took advantage of a pause to say that as the rule against toasts had been broken already, he should like to invade it once more by proposing one himself.

It was difficult to discriminate between the many respected members of the staff present this evening (Davies here looked as if he saw no difficulty when he, Davies, was there), when all were alike so loyal to the interests of the firm, though some, of course, held positions of greater responsibility than others (the managing clerks sniffed in a conscious manner here). At the same time, he felt sure there would be a general desire to encourage the rising generation, who would in their day, he was sure, become prominent members of the profession (a cold perspiration broke out all over me), and he therefore asked them to drink as a toast “The articled clerks,” and to call on the youngest of them to respond. As there is

a sun above—or was before the year of grace 1903—that was me !

Think of it. Not a moment's warning. Not the faintest idea that any such crime was meditated. The senior clerks a little ruffled at the selection of my class, and rather eager for my downfall. The junior clerks regarding it (as indeed it was) as a huge joke almost paling the performance of Briggs. My tongue cleaving to the roof of my mouth and declining to come down. My thoughts wandering in every direction but the one desired. My legs trembling. A mist before my eyes. And when I did find a voice it didn't sound like mine at all, but appeared to belong to somebody else a mile off.

There are some things too sacred for publicity, and my speech that evening is one of them, and I will not, no, I will not, reproduce it on these pages. One of the other articled clerks, who, being older than myself, had escaped the ordeal and sniggered like a brute all the time I was speaking, repeated to me next day, with roars of unfeeling laughter, what he declared I had said. One of my gems was stated by him to have been the preposterous remark (which I never made) that I thought Conveyancing pleasant, Chancery interesting, and Common Law beastly. He also said there were long pauses when nothing came from me, and gurgles came from everybody else. He likewise comforted me by declaring that when, as he supposed, I meant to say that it was a great honour to the articled clerks to have this toast proposed, and I was proud to respond to it ; what I did say was that the articled clerks were proud of toast, and I was an honour to response. As a finishing stroke he swore that I did not finish at all, but

sat down in the middle of a sentence devoid of all meaning. I will say for myself that by the time my tormentor, whose name (which I mention in order to hand it down to infamy) was Oldaker, had finished he was sitting in the middle of a heap of missiles, which included one volume of Stephen's Commentaries, one ditto of Davidson's Precedents, a ruler, the rough draft of a mortgage (which, remember, was a fat document in those days, because the power of sale and other clauses were set out instead of being implied), and his own hat.

Many other "turns" were got through during the evening, notably a very severe and high-toned recitation by Maunders, the managing Chancery clerk, which, as he told me in confidence, was intended to operate as a corrective of the low comedy of Briggs, which he rather despised. It certainly had a lowering effect, and was all about broken hearts and desolated lives.

And then at last we sang "Auld Lang Syne" and went home, certainly not sadder and perhaps not wiser, and when we all met at the office next day and pursued our several tasks—mine being a little disorganised by Oldaker's misconduct before referred to, and my vengeance upon him—it was difficult to realise that the office dinner had been a solid (and liquid) fact, and not a creature of fancy.

And if difficult then to realise it, how much more difficult now when time has done its work upon me and upon all my companions of that evening? I have before me as I write a crude record of the events at the festive board, prepared by one of my fellow articled clerks at the time, and which has been in my possession ever since.

The hand that wrote it will never write another record,

grave or gay. I have before me in remembrance faces that were merry and young then, and which have been stamped since, not at Somerset House, but at a still more inexorable establishment, where penalties are never remitted, and interest is always running, with the impressed stamp used to denote the lapse of thirty years. Of some of those with me that night I have long lost sight; some have gone to the land of Shadows, to await an Originating Summons not issued from the Chancery Division; some have failed in life, and others have succeeded. And not all the King's horses nor all the King's men can bridge over the gulf that time has laboriously, remorselessly, constructed between the young articled clerk who had to make the first speech of his life that night and the elderly legal practitioner who has introduced him to the reader's notice by these presents.

When I take now by virtue of relentless seniority a very different place at the periodical office dinners of a certain firm of solicitors, unbidden guests, seen by no eye but mine, will come in silently from out of the mists of the far-off past and sit down with the rest at the banquet; and I can only banish them again to the shades from whence they appear by summoning to my help the philosophy that I once heard described in a brilliant after-dinner speech in words that, if my memory serves me, the orator traced to a Persian poet:

“ Ah ! fill the cup ! What boots it to repeat
How time is slipping underneath our feet ?
Unborn to-morrow and dead yesterday,
Why fret about them if this hour be gay !”

THE COPYING CLERK PEARSON

THE trite but truthful saying that one half of the world does not know how the other half lives is, I suppose, intended to apply literally to the manner in which the means of living are earned, begged, borrowed, stolen, or otherwise procured. In that sense it has little meaning of course for the small world inside a solicitor's office, because, saving for occasional private earnings of a surprising kind, each person employed knows what every other person is doing or neglecting to do as the case may be, and pretty accurately also what he receives by way of emolument. But it is wonderfully true if applied to the ignorance of many, whose daily work necessitates their spending most waking hours in each other's company in the same office, as to what happens to this or that clerk when the day's work is over and the staff depart in different directions. This is not because solicitors' clerks are an unsociable or mysterious race of beings, but largely because from the nature of things there will be found very distinctly marked social grades among the staff, and hence those who may be on excellent terms during office hours will as a matter of course have no relations with each other elsewhere. They go their very different ways, to meet again the next morning in the exact relationship to

each other that was left behind on the previous evening at the moment of quitting the office.

Copying clerks pure and simple were, I think, a more numerous class as members of a solicitor's staff in my early days than they are now, in London at all events. In those archaic times there were no feminine type-writing establishments plying for business, and agitating at times the susceptible bosoms of articled clerks, and though shorthand writing was recognised as necessary for the rapid demands of business, shorthand writers were not so widely used even in large offices as they are now, but were regarded rather as the sacred and exclusive prerogatives of hard-driven principals. Indeed I remember one city office where a considerable business was done without the aid of a single shorthand writer, because the senior partner held (not without reason too) that the use of that assistance led to slip-shod composition. But this no doubt was a very exceptional case, and elegant composition was cultivated at the cost of office hours so protracted, that I verily believe the prejudice cost him his life.

Whether I am right in thinking that the copying clerk is a declining institution, and very likely I am quite wrong, it is certain that Pearson was employed in that capacity in an office in which I had a seat many years ago. He did nothing but copying from morning to night, except that he occasionally examined the result of his work with another clerk against the rough document from which he had made the copy. He wrote a beautiful round hand, and took a most terrible time to do it, not because he was lazy, which would have been a vice, but because he was painstaking and conscientious, which was a virtue, though a virtue

rather run to seed perhaps. He never looked off his work, never chattered to other clerks, and rarely spoke at all. He was a man of about forty years of age, with a pale face and straggling black whiskers, and a scanty head of hair of the same sombre hue streaked with white. His eyes had a curiously intent look in them, probably arising from the continuous habit of keeping them fixed all day on one paper and copying another. He stooped a good deal, which was also, no doubt, attributable to his occupation, and he was always dressed in rusty black garments. He invited no notice from any one as he pursued his day's work, and he received none beyond a latent, shadowy respect, which I think was generally felt on account of his quiet, inoffensive demeanour, and which showed itself almost unconsciously in his being rarely or never made the subject of a practical joke. The atmosphere of a solicitor's office is not favourable to the growth of that most detestable form of imbecile pleasantry, but it does occasionally spring into sickly existence for a time, or, at all events, it did at the period of which I am writing.

I knew nothing whatever about Pearson. Whether he was married or single; if married, whether he had a large family or none; whether he was a Roman Catholic, a Primitive Methodist, or an Agnostic; whether he was a Conservative, a Liberal, or a Socialist; where he lived; what he did when he left the office; not one of these items of information was known to me, or sought to be known by me. As he sat there hour after hour, day after day, stooping over his work in exactly the same attitude, and always, always copying, he grew to be in my eyes as much a piece of office furniture as the high stool to which

he was glued, and at the rare intervals when he was off the stool the combined article seemed to me in fancy to have, as it were, come in half.

But it came to pass that by one of those coincidences always deemed extraordinary and always happening, I did get to know a great deal about Pearson. I had a friend who was much interested in the labour of a parson who was an old college chum of his and had charge of an East End parish that was poor even amongst East End parishes. I am writing of a time when "slumming" had not become a recognised institution; when the west of London had not stretched its right hand of sympathy towards the east and the south to anything like the same extent as now; when the cry of the submerged tenth had not made itself heard by ears dulled with more agreeable sounds, and the sights to be seen in those parts had not come within the vision of eyes swelled with fatness. My friend used frequently to visit this parson and come away feeling, as he told me, that he ought to sell all that he had and hand it over, and also feeling when he got back that somehow or other he did not quite see his way to do it. Being a lawyer, it occurred to me that there was a precedent for his case in a certain text-book that has never required to be revised in consequence of Acts of Parliament or decisions of the Courts, but I hasten to add on the testimony of the parson himself that my friend's purse, as well as his support and sympathy, were invaluable to him in his up-hill fight with poverty, ignorance, and crime.

Moved, I fear, by no more creditable motive than curiosity, I was induced one evening, after business hours, to go with my friend to see the parson of whom I had

heard him speak. The church was in a very narrow street, and the vicarage (save the mark!) next to it. The vicarage was immediately opposite to a public-house of the most pronounced East End type, and at night it was hardly possible to open any of the windows, even in the most stifling weather, by reason of the sounds which proceeded from the licensed establishment on the other side of the way. The Vicar had a young wife and two little children, and I got to know somehow that for daily exercise and recreation the only available spot to which the latter could be conducted was a small enclosed space which was a dis-used burial ground, containing to the best of my recollection the bones of departed Hebrews. They looked very frail and delicate (I mean the wife and children, not the bones), and but for their going away periodically to kind friends in the country, I do not imagine that they could have lived long in such surroundings without serious injury to health.

The parson was full of energy and pluck—God knows, he had need to be—and as we sat at an evening meal with him, he readily gratified my curiosity by telling me of his work and its difficulties, and, above all, the perpetual and most uncongenial task of trying to get money from outside for the many crying needs of his parish. I asked him if he had a curate, and he answered that he had one, but could have found employment for four if it were possible to meet the expense.

“Still,” he said cheerily, “don’t think I’m growling, because in many ways I am helped splendidly even by some of my own people here. One man is as good as a curate to me in everything but help in the services, and even in them he reads the lessons, and never misses taking a class

in the Sunday schools, summer or winter. He is at work all day, but when he gets back in the evening to a little lodging near here (much poorer than he need live in if he did not give away nearly all he earns), he writes night after night for us, addressing my begging letters, writing out many of them for me, teaching at the night school, speaking to the lads whom he gets together, and helping them quietly in a hundred ways. He is not much to look at, but he is a splendid fellow nevertheless, and what we should do without him, I don't know." He turned to his wife, who echoed fervently, "What, indeed!"

"What is he?" I asked.

"He is some sort of a law clerk, I believe, but it must be in a humble way, as he is well on in years, and can only be earning a small salary, and I can never gather that he has any prospects. Indeed, he told me once that he was getting as much as he could ever expect, and, as he added in his quiet way, as much as he was worth, but he hardly ever says a word about himself, and he has not, I believe, a relation in the world known to him."

"And his name?"

"Pearson."

I started, because although there are many law clerks and many Persons, something in the description seemed instinctively to bring before me the copying clerk whom I knew so well, and yet did not know at all.

"Do you know where he works?" I asked with some eagerness.

The parson gave me the address, and it was none other than the office in which I was working myself, and I therefore identified Pearson beyond a doubt.

I showed my surprise unmistakably. Indeed, I am afraid I said "By Jove!" which was not a proper expression to use at a vicarage, or perhaps anywhere else. Then I tried to smother that pagan expletive by hurriedly telling the Vicar and his wife who and what Pearson was in the daytime, and how little I had suspected the manner of life he led apart from the office.

They were naturally much interested, and the Vicar soon told me that, if I liked, I could see Pearson himself, as it was one of the night school evenings, and the Vicar himself would shortly be looking in. And then he suddenly paused, and I divined the cause of his hesitation, and assured him earnestly that I would on no consideration disclose at the office what I learnt about Pearson that evening, and promised to repeat the assurance (as I afterwards did) to Pearson himself.

So we sallied out, the Vicar, my friend, and I, and after passing through a varied assortment of pestiferously smelling streets, we reached a ramshackle building that looked as if it had once been some sort of a little factory or storehouse, and had got past its work, and also looked as if it might very readily fall in ; and, when we got inside, all the varied odours we had encountered on the way appeared to have come in with us at the door and mixed socially with each other.

And there was the night school, where reading, writing, and arithmetic were taught to such of the rougher lads of the parish as could be induced by kind persuasion to come in : remember, please, again that I am referring to times when School Boards and Board Schools were not. And here, in the midst of them, teaching writing at that moment,

of all things on this earth to teach after writing all day and every day himself, was Pearson. He looked up when we entered, and on catching sight of me he started violently and his pale face flushed all over, but I made my way to him instantly, and shook his hand warmly, and in a few minutes I was able to set him quite at his ease, and to see him again absorbed in his labour of love. Let me put in parenthetically here that to no living soul in the office did I ever betray Pearson's confidence, or show there, even to him, any outward consciousness of what I had learnt. It would not see the light even now, but that Pearson himself has long since ended his journey, and his eyes have beheld the land that is very far off.

I said just now the rougher lads. They were, in fact, about as rough a lot as ever I set eyes on in dress, manner, speech, and want of cleanliness; and their ages ranged from about fifteen to nineteen, the Vicar's wish, as I learnt, being to capture those who had passed all ordinary chances of school without learning anything at all except evil, of which there was plenteous teaching available for them gratis by the best professors. I take it that between fifteen and nineteen a boy brought up in thoroughly vicious surroundings has had time to become about as bad as it is possible for the genus boy to be, and I was not surprised when the Vicar told me of inaugural ceremonies in the way of free fights, blood-curdling language, and general pandemonium that attended the institution of the class. "But," he whispered to me as we stood there, "Pearson has the most wonderful influence over them. They will do anything for him. I don't know what it is exactly in that quiet, timid, and intellectually

dull man that appeals to such better instincts as their bringing up has left for us to work upon, but it is a fact, and I think that somehow it gets even into their rough natures that he is simply giving his life to them, as indeed he is. They show it in odd ways that don't exactly meet my clerical approval" (he put this in with a sly twinkle of the eye), "as, for instance, not long ago, when a great big lad came in, nominally to join the class, but really to create a row, from which he no doubt anticipated good sport. He began to use bad language immediately he came in; but bad language is unhappily the vernacular about here, and that did not attract much notice, until he applied an abusive epithet to Pearson, and threatened him with violence, perhaps not meaning it. I learnt the next day that within two minutes he was in the street outside in a very bruised and battered condition, and that but for Pearson's entreaties he would have been half-killed. When the class was over Pearson hunted him up, attended to his cuts and bruises, and cast that wonderful influence of his over the offender, and now there he is at that corner, and I am certain that if another intruder were to come in to-night and insult Pearson, that lad would be the first to take his coat off and go for him." He pointed as he spoke to a shambling specimen of youth who was laboriously trying to surmount the difficulties of a capital G by spreading himself in an ink-stained condition almost all round the object of attack, while Pearson bent over him and laid an encouraging hand lightly upon the lad's shoulder.

Verily it was a revelation to me to see this side of Pearson's life, and he was thenceforth invested in my eyes with an admiring and pathetic interest, and all the more so

because I alone knew what manner of man he was. It may be also that then and since I have compared his occupations out of office hours with my own without finding the result very satisfactory ; but I am writing about Pearson and not about myself, and the ghosts of wasted opportunities and golden hours frittered away in the idle chase after happiness along a road to which a wise man gave the name of *Vanitas Vanitatum* must remain in the cupboard till I get through this paper at all events, though they have a nasty way of coming to stay with me uninvited, and are then as hard to induce to go to bed as I once was myself.

The parson had said that he did not know what they would do without Pearson, but alas for the parson—I do not also say alas for Pearson—that dire emergency had to be faced, and it was faced I know bravely, though with an aching heart. For close sedentary toil in an office all day, followed by evenings spent in unhealthy rooms, and with Sundays in just the same surroundings thrown in, knocked at the door of a constitution undermined by insufficient nourishment and neglect of all the laws of health, and Pearson gradually failed ; so gradually, that in the office no change was noticed except by myself until long after he had begun to descend the hill, unless perhaps a chance observation was made that Pearson was, if possible, slower than ever. I knew something more of it through my friend and the parson, and more than once I contrived an opportunity of urging Pearson privately, as they did, to take rest and change. But I don't think he really wished it otherwise, and at all events nothing would induce him to alter his mode of life or relax his voluntary work in the

least degree. I was told, and indeed I saw evidence of it more than once with my own eyes, that the noisiest and roughest of the lads he used to teach and help would keep still when the whisper went round that he was not well, and wistful eyes would look at him with affectionate anxiety, and in many a clumsy way they tried to show that they were mindful of him.

Then came a day when the office stool on which he had drudged so patiently for so many years was empty, and an excuse was sent that he was not well enough to come to the office ; and, as it proved, he had engrossed his last deed, and That Indenture Witnessed that he never came again. Not many weeks afterwards a slight shock passed through the office on news coming that he had died ; and then a new copyist was engaged, and sat on the same office stool, and This Indenture Witnessed that another drudged in his stead.

But very different was the mourning for him in that East End parish, where a desolating sense of irreparable loss was felt, not only by the parson, whose right hand he had been, but by many a rude, ignorant London rough, whom he had softened and humanised, and taught to go straight by his own splendid example of self-sacrifice ; and tears made channels that day down unwashed faces when he was laid in a cemetery out eastward, where the tombstones in their serried rows looked as orderly and regular as the words in one of Pearson's own engrossments, and the few imposing tombs might have been the capital letters. And if as I stood there with my friend, while the parson, in a voice shaken by grief, read the service, I added my own tribute of flowers that meant little, and a catching of the

breath that meant much, who shall tell me that I had any need to be ashamed?

Thus the copying-clerk, Pearson, lived and died ; and of all the companions of his daily toil in the office, I alone—and that by a pure accident—knew that the dull, quiet man, who copied so slowly and spoke so seldom and attracted no attention from anybody, was a king among men, though his crown was not prepared for him on this side of the grave.

HOW TOMKINS ENJOYED GARDENING¹

“How are you, Tomkins? Very glad to see you. Just hold this flower-pot, will you? Mater, here’s Mr. Tomkins.”

I was (and still am) Tomkins, and that was how Chalker greeted me on my arrival last Whitsuntide at a country abode which he had just taken and furnished as a place for occasional retreat from toil and care.

I knew Chalker only very slightly as a busy London lawyer. The reason why it came to pass that I went to stay with him and his spouse was that Manders was a very old friend of mine and theirs; that Manders and his wife were abiding as visitors for a few days with the Chalkers, and that wherever little Mary (as metaphorically representing the Manderses) went the lamb (that is me) was sure to go. In other words, I was at all times, and especially at holiday times, a recognised standing appendage of the Manders’ domestic establishment.

I had never before seen Chalker in anything but the soberest professional garments or evening dress. I beheld him now in a pair of dilapidated flannel trousers kept rather imperfectly in position by an ancient belt with a gilt

¹ This sketch, under a slightly different name, was originally contributed to the *English Illustrated Magazine*, and I have to thank both the former and present proprietors for their courtesy in readily consenting to its republication in this volume.—E. F. T.

representation on it of the "All England Eleven," a shirt of the same material with the sleeves rolled up to the elbows, a pair of nondescript shoes that seemed to have originally had something to do with rowing, and to have become reduced to want, and a cap of sorts on the back of his head. He was in a violent state of horticulture, being much moved thereunto by the vigorous exertions of Manders, who really loved gardening, and Horace Pooley, an old friend of Chalker's, who was also very keen on that occupation, and who stood in much the same relation to him as I did to Manders and his better half, and, as I soon found, did not like any one else staying in the house but himself. Occasional assistance was being rendered by Chalker's own real live Sussex gardener, Snokes, who however, for the most part, regarded the proceedings with bucolic contempt, and became to me a positive source of terror when I met his eye.

To return to the flower-pot. When Chalker handed it to me I received it with some surprise, but grasped it mechanically in both hands. Then, as Mrs. Chalker came forward to greet me, followed by Mrs. Manders, I let go of it with one hand in order to disengage that member for purposes of salutation and freedom of movement, because a man cannot make much of himself in the presence of ladies when he is holding a flower-pot with both hands. I had, however, miscalculated the weight of the article, and it fell partly on to Chalker's smooth gravel path, and partly on to Chalker's toe, smashing the pot, breaking the plant, and scattering the mould in all directions. I apologised and made weak attempts to pick up the pieces, but Chalker did not seem to care about it, and I rather thought I caught a

muttered expression which sounded like "Ham." Chalker did keep a pig.

This awkward episode over, I escaped into the house, and then, after changing my travelling clothes for my best tennis get-up, I sallied out into the garden and joined the party. I found Pooley and Manders bedding out plants, and the two ladies encamped in a corner with needlework that they did not do, and books that they did not read, because the weather was lovely, and nothing but talking mild scandal seemed peaceful enough to fit in with it. I did not see Chalker at first, and when I did behold him I almost shrieked, for he was lying on the lawn face downwards, and I caught sight of a bottle labelled "Poison." But I soon found that this was Chalker's usual position, and that his favourite pursuit, I might almost say passion, was to eradicate dandelions by piercing them to the heart with a pointed weapon dipped into a very powerful poison. I tested the power of the poison, because Chalker spilt some on my new tennis shoes, and they almost disappeared from view in a cloud. He said he was very sorry, but what wonderful stuff it was.

I know nothing about gardening: the proper time to put things in and take them out; the aspect that is best or worst; the cuttings and clippings and trimmings; the soil that will and will not suit the floral constitution; the time of year at which particular plants conduct themselves in a particular way; the best receipt for killing weeds on a path; the time for watering and for leaving it severely alone; the means of discriminating between a highly efficient and industrious gardener and a hopeless impostor who would laugh at you in his sleeve if he had a coat on. All are

occult mysteries to me. Moreover, I thirst not for knowledge on any of these subjects, and I have a slight tendency to obesity, and cannot abide stooping. It is necessary to explain this, because no one can feel for me that sympathy which I yearn for in the reader who does not bear it in mind.

I made for the ladies, and talked for a while in my best Piccadilly style. And then Mrs. Chalker suddenly made an observation pregnant with consequences to me.

"We are all great gardeners, Mr. Tomkins, and my husband has taken to it so vigorously that he hardly does anything else when he's down here. Do you like gardening?"

I told a lie—a red-hot, unadulterated, heedless, wicked, far-reaching lie. I said I did. Don't talk to me about the wicked flourishing in this world.

"Oh, how delightful! My husband will be *so* pleased. Frank" (this to the back view of the grovelling Chalker), "here's another recruit for you! Mr. Tomkins loves gardening!"

Chalker jerked his head round as if he were swimming, and had just changed to the side-stroke.

"That's splendid! If you wouldn't mind helping Manders and Pooley to bed out the geraniums they will bless you. You had better take your coat off as it's warm work."

Manders, who was familiar with my habits, knew in his secret soul that I was being let in, and I caught a malicious twinkle in his eye as he welcomed my assistance. I bore it in mind, and managed to drop a flower-pot on his hand afterwards from a fairly good height. Pooley, on the other hand, eyed me with a rather sour expression on his face,

and I perceived that he, as an old family friend, considered the garden his special preserve, and was jealous of my intrusion.

I meekly took my coat off, and asked how I could best help them. Manders appealed to Pooley as gardener-in-chief, and Pooley said very drily:—

“Perhaps Mr. Tomkins would like to do the bedding out if we bring the plants to him.” Thereupon Manders sniggered. Hang them both!

“No, thank you,” I answered. “I can see you are a master of the art, Mr. Pooley. I will humbly bring the plants while you and Manders do the rest.”

The plants of course were in the green-houses, and I went backwards and forwards in the broiling sun, fetching and carrying, for I cannot say how long. Now and again Snokes joined in, not to do any real work, but just to show that he knew how to carry four plants at a time when I could only carry two, and that his clothes were too shabby for it to hurt them, while mine, on the other hand, were being ruined.

I might have put up with it more cheerfully if I could have got anybody to talk to me. But the ladies were too far off, Chalker was still lying with his nose close to the ground, and Manders and Pooley were so engrossed in the task of sticking in geraniums that they paid no more attention to me than if I had been a lobworm.

At last I heard a welcome clinking of cups and saucers, and tea was brought out into the garden. This, thought I, must mean a cessation of degrading manual labour, a little general conversation, and perchance a game of tennis in the cool of the evening.

Not so ; Chalker called out from the earth that he should like to finish this bit of lawn, and would some one bring his tea ; so a cup of tea was placed beside his bottle of poison and he continued to lie on the grass. Pooley and Manders were so ardently desirous of seeing the fruit of completed labour on an enormous circular bed that they would not have any tea at all ; and as Snokes had just gone off to have his tea, I must needs go on drudging away between the greenhouses and the beds, and say I did not mind.

Well, the circular bed was finished as the shades of evening descended, and Chalker was persuaded to rise reluctantly from his humiliating position. And then, as I am a sinful man, the ladies, who had had their tea and been for a little walk (I was not even asked if I would like to go—Mrs. Chalker said she knew it was no good asking any of us gardeners), broke out in a fresh place. They said they must really do something to help, and began to water the entire garden ; and they called for volunteers to fetch cans of water to pour into their watering-pots. More toil, resulting in making damp all the dry mould and dirt on my clothes accumulated during my bondage under Pooley and Manders.

How I blessed the bell that rang to announce that it was time to dress for dinner ! How eagerly I cleaned myself (washing does not express it) and put on fresh raiment, and took my proper place in society ! I will say that Chalker was hospitable and the dinner good. I will not even deny a certain amount of calm satisfaction in sitting at ease after hours of hard labour. I might even have enjoyed myself if, after the ladies had retired early, Chalker, Pooley, and Manders had not persisted in talking hard about gardening

till we went to bed, in spite of every effort I made to draw the conversation into some other channel.

When we retired I slept soundly enough, as well I might; but I was not allowed the full measure of repose on which I had reckoned. First I dreamt that I was on a treadmill holding two pots of geraniums, which I was vainly endeavouring to pass up to Pooley and Manders, who were several steps higher up. Then I thought that a warder with a face unaccountably like Chalker's kept calling to me in a harsh voice to try harder and harder to reach them. Then the warder's voice as well as his face seemed to gradually get like Chalker's. Then I realised that it *was* Chalker's voice, and that he was calling to me from outside the window.

I rubbed my eyes, thinking now that it was a fire, and in my half-awakened condition picturing myself bearing Mrs. Chalker and Mrs. Manders to a place of safety at some (but not too much) personal risk, and then putting an anonymous account of it in the paper. Then I rose and went to the window. Chalker was there, dressed exactly as I had seen him on arrival yesterday, "All England Eleven" belt included.

"Pooley and Manders will be down in a minute," he said. "It's a lovely morning, and we thought you'd like to come."

"Come where?" I asked, as the cold morning breeze sported with my scanty covering, and I shivered.

"Oh, didn't we tell you? We wanted to get some ivy roots to climb up the rockery at the corner of the tennis lawn, so we thought we'd get out early before breakfast. I remember now, we arranged it before you came."

Just as Chalker finished speaking Manders bounded out of the house like a school-boy. He looked up at me, and taking in the situation at a glance indulged in a fiendish grin at my expense. If a boulder had been handy to roll down, Mander's life would have paid the penalty.

What was I to do? I tried a feeble subterfuge. "Thanks very much indeed," I replied with chattering teeth, "I should like to come awfully, but somehow I always get a headache if I go out on an empty stomach."

"So do I," replied the merciless Chalker, "and I always provide against it, and you shall share my remedy." He held up and broke in half before my eyes a specimen of that appalling form of Spartan nutriment, a captain's biscuit. I ask any unprejudiced person to say whether a captain's biscuit is an article of food to contemplate with anything but nausea before the latter part of the ninth day on an open raft.

I retired from the window, put on the first clothes I could find—what clothes, I don't know, but I rather think flannel trousers and a frock-coat were the mainstay. Then I slunk down unshaven, unwashed, chilled to the marrow, to receive from the hands of Chalker the baked paving-stone before alluded to. Pooley came out at the same moment, and I could see him looking scornfully at me from the corners of his eyes as I vainly tried to find a tooth which might have some chance of not breaking in pieces if it seriously contended with Chalker's horrid gift.

I remember having cherished in early life the preposterous fiction that it is a fine thing, a healthy and enjoyable pastime, to go and bathe in the sea before breakfast. I have on more than one occasion formed one of a shivering party

assembled at early dawn with blue gills and internal sinkings, all declaring to each other with most unnecessary vehemence what splendid fun it was. I had long given over such shams and follies when I went to stay with Chalker, but as we started off to get ivy roots at break of dawn, with a cold mist permeating our respective vitals, I began almost to feel for an imaginary towel round my neck, and to wonder whether, when I came out of the water, my socks and shirt would be floating about as usual in the bathing-machine.

We had not even a bracing walk to bring the glow of health to my blanched cheek. Chalker's house was situated so close to the vicinity of ivy that he began to prog for it in the bank by the roadside almost before we had emerged from the front gate, and very soon he and Manders and Pooley were hard at work grubbing out damp roots, which they gave me to hold in a basket. At last I grew bold and spake.

"Do you know," I said to Chalker, "I feel a bit chilly? If you don't mind, I will put this basket down and take a good turn just to get the circulation up."

"By all means," replied he; "but I can promise you some warm work after breakfast; so I hope you won't tire yourself beforehand. We have a tremendous job to tackle!"

"Oh!" replied I faintly, "what is that?"

"Why, didn't I tell you? Oh no, I remember this was arranged also before you came. Well, you may have noticed rather a bare corner at the end of the garden, near the rose-trees. We are going up to the common to get stones to make a rockery there, and then get some ferns to

put in. We can bring some in a wheelbarrow and carry others, and we shall have to go backwards and forwards a good many times, and carry some pretty big weights before we've done. Pooley thought of it, and Manders and I agreed it would be great fun, besides being no end of an improvement to the garden. We shall welcome another willing hand immensely to help us, and my wife tells me you like gardening better than anything in the world."

That vindictive, unabashed lie of mine was finding me out with a vengeance, and Mrs. Chalker had evidently been improving on it in nuptial confidences till I hardly knew it by sight.

I looked round me for a victim, and I saw Manders in a stooping position, eagerly clutching at an ivy-root, with his head in juxtaposition to a clump of stinging nettles. What was more, Manders appeared to me to be shaking like a jelly-fish, as if nurturing illicit mirth. In one moment I realised that he had heard Chalker's observations and was laughing at me, and in two moments Manders was sprawling in the nettles, while I stood by and grimly apologised for stumbling against him. Manders did not score that time, anyhow.

When we returned from this expedition, Chalker, with Pooley and Manders, made straight for the rockery up which the ivy-roots were expected to climb. I, for my part, essayed to hand Manders the basket and sneak indoors to go to bed again, or to shave, or to wash, or do anything to get away from horticulture in its damp and early form. But Manders had been hurt by the flower-pot and stung by the nettles, and he was not going to let me off now. He blandly disregarded the proffered basket.

"Why, Chalker," he said, "here's this modest chap pro-

posing to retire after helping us in all the hard work, and when we are just going to reap the fruits of it. And all the time I know he is bursting to put in some of the roots if you'll let him."

Chalker protested that he would not hear of my going in, and indeed, he said that he had counted on my taking his place, as he knew I should like it, and he just wanted to slay a few more dandelions before breakfast now that the sun was out and the grass not too wet to lie down on it. Whereupon he fetched his poison and his pointed instrument and once more crawled upon the ground in a despicable attitude.

Left with Pooley and Manders I was helpless and hopeless. They set to work to stick in ivy roots, which they inserted with great dexterity. I tried to follow their example, but I could not get any ivy roots to stick somehow, whether because I did not put them in deep enough, or because I selected spots that had no depth of soil, I cannot say. I only know that Pooley scowled at my failures, and Manders smiled (but he had to smile through nettle-rash, which was some comfort), and that on turning my head round once to use bad language without being heard I encountered the gaze of Snokes, who was watching me with absorbed attention, and seemed to think I was making a fool of myself for his morning amusement. I resolved on the spot that when I left I would not tip Snokes so much as a threepenny bit.

The ladies came out just before breakfast and rallied us on our enthusiasm. I would have given much to confess all, but I had not the moral courage and could only reply with a wan smile as I passed them to go indoors.

The expedition in search of stones was the main subject of conversation at breakfast, and Chalker spoke of it as if he were giving a splendid entertainment.

"You mustn't overtire Mr. Tonkins, Frank, dear," said Mrs. Chalker, looking kindly at me; "remember you have all been up very early."

"Oh! you needn't be afraid of that," broke in Manders, "Tomkins is as strong as a horse. Aren't you, old chap?"

I could not trust myself to answer Manders for fear of saying something that would have broken up the party, so I took a large bite of toast.

"Perhaps Mr. Tomkins would prefer to go for a drive with us ladies," resumed my hostess.

Here was my chance.

"Thank you very much, I——"

"Now, my dear," interposed Chalker, "don't you know that Mr. Tomkins is devoted to gardening, and what possible comparison is there between tamely driving in a cart and assisting in the glorious enterprise we have in view? He can't say no to you because of the laws of politeness, so I must say it for him."

Dear, kind, opportune Chalker!

So the ladies went off for a delightful drive, and I stood and watched them at the gate till Chalker roared out from the stable yard to ask if I would like to wheel one of the barrows up the hill that led to the common.

Three times did I toil up that hill and down again, sometimes on the return journey carrying as many stones as I could hold, and sometimes wheeling a barrowful of them. The fourth time was to be the last, and I breathed a sigh of intense relief as we reached the common, loaded our-

selves, and started back again. I was not wheeling the barrow on that occasion, but carrying a great block of stone under which I almost staggered.

I don't know how it was done. A rut in the road, a loose stone, something made my foot slip, and in a moment I had lost my balance and was down, with the stone I was carrying on the top of me as if I were dead and had a monument erected over me already. Acute pains in the right knee and left ankle, bruised sensations all over—all these I instantly experienced. But at once and through all there came a sweet peaceful feeling of deep and heartfelt thankfulness, a sense of infinite relief, a consciousness of having reached a haven of repose.

I could not be asked to do any more gardening.

When I tried to rise I could not stand, much less walk, so the stones were emptied out of the barrow, and I was wheeled home, like Mr. Pickwick on a celebrated occasion, but in a more creditable condition.

Chalker was deeply concerned about me. Manders looked as penitent as if he had done it himself, and even Pooley melted and was kind to me. And then when the doctor came and pronounced that I had sprained my ankle and dislocated my knee, besides being badly bruised, how jolly it was to see them all so sorry and so attentive to my wants. How I was carried out into the garden like a dear little baby. How the ladies ministered to me like angels. How Snokes sidled up and said well, he was sorry, he was, that he was. How the maid-servants peeped at me sympathetically whenever they had a chance. How the parish clergyman called and left a card with kind inquiries, having been positively informed in the village that I had fallen

down a gravel pit and broken both legs and one arm. How contentedly I watched Chalker at his dandelions, and Pooley and Manders labouring in various ways that were not my ways, while Mrs. Chalker and Mrs. Manders talked to me in soothing and sisterly tones, and pitied me for not being able to work in the garden with the others.

I tell you I never enjoyed a stay at a country house so much in all my life.

AN AFFAIR OF THE HEART

PREFATORY NOTE

[The following tale of true love has been recounted to me by a middle-aged solicitor, who was a fellow articled-clerk of mine thirty odd years ago. I narrate it in the first person singular, not because the story had anything to do with me personally—such a supposition would be laughable, if not libellous—but as being the more direct and simple method to follow. To dissociate myself from it beyond all possibility of doubt, I had thought of putting the whole paper into quotation, but I am told that inverted commas, if extensively used in print, are very expensive, and also rather bewildering to the eye of the reader.]

PART I

ACROSS THE BAR

OF all things to bring back to my memory a love episode of my youth, I suppose nothing odder could be imagined than the fact of my reading in a newspaper that Newgate was being demolished. Nevertheless, that announcement conducted me straight back to a subterranean restaurant in Newgate Street, and to a young lady who officiated on the

business side of a luncheon counter in that establishment. Her name was Alice Simpson and I loved her, though my parents knew it not. They were also unaware that I offered her my hand and heart almost every time I visited the establishment after the first three or four occasions, and that she neither accepted nor refused the same, but avoided any direct answer to my suit in a manner that I now consider skilful. Being only eighteen years old, and at an early stage of my Articles, I was compelled to do so under the reservation of her waiting for me nine or ten years, which was, I admit, a long time, especially for one who had to wait behind a bar. If my suit had prospered—and oh! how I wished it might then—I wonder whether Miss Alice Simpson would have been ultimately raised by me to the exalted station which I now by universal acclaim occupy, and whether she would have adorned the same, or whether I should have descended by easy stages to playing potman to her barmaid; also, whether we should have loved each other ever more and more, or alternately summoned each other to the Police Court for assault. Such speculations are the idlest of the idle, but they have a certain attraction, nevertheless, for the thoughtful-minded.

She was tall, stylish-looking, and very pretty, on the fair side (I don't mean her fair side, but the fair side of beauty), and she dressed with considerable taste, though perhaps just a little loudly. Her golden-brown hair did duty at the back of her shapely head as the outer covering of a chignon of about the size and shape of a Rugby football. I remark, parenthetically, that this generation can never hope to see that curiosity in the way of unspeakably appalling disfigurement of woman, the chignon, which flourished in my youth,

and that my Alice—at least, she wasn't my Alice, but I wanted her to be so—was in no way out of the fashion of her day in that respect, unless perhaps that her chignon may have been one size larger than the average article at that particular time. If it was, she did but play the part of a pioneer, for the chignon ultimately grew to be as large as a balloon, and then very properly burst and was seen no more. Her voice was soothing to the ear, though I have to admit that her aspirates were intermittent and her grammar not faultless. It was one of my day-dreams that I would gently and patiently lure her into the use of the letter "h," in moderation, in those places where it ought to be, and its omission where it was an intruder, and give her lessons in the construction of elegant sentences, thus removing the only blemishes in an otherwise perfect woman. Her age was never known to me, and never will be now, but I fancy she must have been not far short of thirty. Did I ever think then that she was a bit lengthy in the tooth, and that there was a difference in years between us on the wrong side? Most certainly not. Enough for me that the world contained only one woman worthy to be loved, and that the peerless party in question was Alice Simpson.

I cannot recall exactly how it came to pass that I first paid what proved to be a momentous visit to the establishment in which Alice was a dispenser of solid and liquid refreshment to the public. The office in which I was articled was in the heart of the city, and I had no near relatives or friends confined in Newgate at the time, while the hours during which I was out of the office were largely spent farther westward, in attending at Courts, Public

Legal Offices, and Chambers of Counsel, in the pursuit of knowledge. I must have stumbled on it somehow in search of lunch, when stranded in that direction, and before I had got through two sawdusty ham-sandwiches and half a pint of bitter ale, this heart—now fit only to go into Dock at Bad Nauheim—was all in a flutter on account of Alice, the fair, the beautiful, the gracious, the enchanting, the—the—in fact, the barmaid. If there had been twelve barmaids there, she would still have been to me *the* barmaid, but, as a matter of fact, she was the only one, for it was not a large place, and the proprietor and his wife, assisted by Alice, represented the staff.

I opened a bashful conversation across the bar, and lingered inordinately over my simple repast, gazing the while at her who was on the other side of the counter, and when I left Alice transported me (I have said it was close to Newgate, but I don't mean that sort of transportation), by saying she hoped I would come in again. Come in again! By George! dear reader, I haunted the place, and lunch anywhere else would have been a sacrilege. It nearly choked me there with emotion, for I fell most desperately and hopelessly in love with Alice, and first confessed my love through the interstices of a beer-engine at my third or it might have been my fourth visit. She said I was a foolish boy, though she seemed gratified, and, as I have already hinted, all my pleadings, then and afterwards, failed to draw any declaration from her. To lawyers of mature age there is a subtle joke of some merit embedded in that sentence, for the detection of which a small prize may perhaps be offered when better times come.

It is human to err. It is also human to love, and I

don't claim to have discovered the art, but this I will say that to make love as I did across a bar counter, restaurant, with the proprietor and his wife skirmishing about on one side, and promiscuous visits from members of the public occurring at frequent intervals on the other side, demanded from me an amount of devotion, dexterity, and patience that baffles description. A bar counter remember is wide. The object of affection cannot be embraced across it even if she be so disposed ; and my wildest hopes in that way never soared beyond an occasional dab at Alice's hand, which I had to pretend was accidental, and which generally missed the object aimed at. Then again, think of the pangs endured by me when compliments were paid to her by other visitors—men with whiskers, full-blown, self-assured, offensive men. I told myself a thousand times that these made no real impression on her, that of course she had to be civil to customers or she would get into trouble with her employers, that it would not be for long—only for nine or ten years—and then I should carry her away as my blooming bride (I use the word blooming in the sense in which it is applied to the peach and not as an expletive), and would slay any one who so much as looked at her. But I derived only slender comfort from these attempts to console myself, and was consumed with jealousy as with a fever.

Also it was an expensive time. When the heart is full of love it is a relief to give presents to the adored one, and moreover, she expects it. I asked Alice the size of her hand for gloves, and she put it out across the counter and said eights. I touched her hand that time—the whole eight of it if I may use the expression—and next day I

presented her with three pairs. I am able at this distance of time to acknowledge dispassionately that eights is large for a woman, and that Alice's hand might in time have become a trial to me if my hopes had been realised and it had become mine, and I can also now thankfully remember that the price of gloves did not depend upon the size.

A pair of ear-rings was presented by me shortly afterwards, and in consequence of the expense of that offering my watch secretly disappeared from my pocket at the same time. I wore a spoon-bait (after first detaching the hooks) at the end of the chain so that the deficiency might not be noticed at home or detected by prying eyes at the office, and once on being asked the time in the street I took the spoon-bait out before I remembered, which was embarrassing. Then one day a vendor of miscellaneous articles of use and ornament came into the restaurant, partly bent on liquid refreshment and partly in the hope of business. He placed on the counter a box containing his wares while he partook of a pint of stout, but his right eye, which was lodged, as it were, on the outer rim of the pewter pot was fixed intently on me while he was drinking, as I noticed when I happened to turn round in a momentary pause between my whispers of words of devotion to Alice across that dreadful expanse of counter. Then he pushed the box in an absent way, so that it was immediately in front of her, and she began to toy with its contents. She took up a fruit-knife, and said it was lovely.

“How much is it?” I asked the man.

“Ten-and-six, it's solid silver,” he replied, doubtless prepared to be beaten down to about half-a-crown, and make a good profit then. But one who loves as I loved

does not beat down vendors of fruit-knives where the object is to present it to the adored one, and I whipped out ten shillings and sixpence like a lord, and presented the knife to the blushing Alice. As a matter of fact it was my next week's allowance for lunches. I could not go without lunch, because then I should have had to deny myself to Alice, or rather Alice to myself, lunch being the peg of all my visits, so the gap had to be made good by the secret realisation of my winter overcoat, which I did not so much mind as it was summer time. The man looked very pleased, as he had good reason to be, and departed with profuse thanks, and the proprietor's wife, attracted by the incident, came and, looking over Alice's shoulder at the knife, said she was a very lucky girl to get such a nice present, and then told me that I must not spoil her. It was a proud moment, and I considered it cheap at the price.

When a solicitor's articled clerk expires before his articles of clerkship it is the very right and proper custom for the solicitor to return a proportionate part of the fee received with the departed one. No such return is made however during any period in which the articled clerk is in love, and thereby totally incapacitated for the time being from deriving any benefit from his apprenticeship, and I invite attention to the point as one that seems to me deserving of consideration. Take my case, for instance. During the period—which lasted some months—in which I loved Alice Simpson to distraction I might have been inside Newgate prison, instead of a frequenter of the restaurant hard by, for any advance that I made in my professional training. To begin with I had to lunch at that bar every day or die in the attempt. I shirked every

piece of work that interfered with it, and made the most outrageous and insincere excuses for my acts of default. Then I used to linger over lunch till Alice was obliged to tell me to go, as the proprietor would not like it. And to this has to be added the hindrance to work represented by my adoration for that young woman ; my jealousy on her account ; my ardent hope that one day—nine or ten years hence as aforesaid—she would be mine ; the composition of verses in her honour (she said they were beautiful, but I doubt now whether she read them, and one poem accidentally dropped into a plate of Irish stew, because I slipped it over the counter at an awkward moment) ; the shifts and devices to which I was put in order to lay offerings upon her altar—I mean her counter—and at the same time keep up appearances on my very slender allowance and rapidly diminishing personal effects ; the one consuming, absorbing, never-absent subject of Alice. What did, what could, all this leave over for the duties of my articled state and the study of those beautiful, consistent, simple, satisfying laws of England which are now my only solace in life ? I answer nothing at all. I was as one dead to the law for the time being, and some allowance, I don't say a full proportionate allowance, but a sort of Articled-Clerk-in-love Compensation Act allowance, should, I think, really be made in such cases. If this simple little suggestion commends itself to the profession and becomes generally adopted I shall not have loved Alice Simpson in vain, and even the expenditure of ten-and-sixpence on the fruit-knife will come back to me upon the waters, not in a gross or material form but in the consciousness of good work accomplished.

PART II

BEYOND THE BARRIER

IT may seem strange that my communications with the object of my affections have thus far been referred to only in connection with the trammels of a bar counter. The intelligent reader who has known himself what it is to love (and all of my readers are necessarily intelligent and have almost necessarily loved) will have been struck by the thought that, granting my inability to scale a bar counter without being ejected at once from properly conducted licensed premises, Alice Simpson cannot always have been on the other side of the barrier that she probably did not live on the premises at all, and that she had to come in the morning and to leave probably with some alacrity in the evening. Why then, it will be asked, was not I round the corner? Why did I not seek opportunity of seeing Alice home in the evening to her domestic abode, which I may say at once was in Shoreditch?

I am able to reply to these questions in a manner that reflects the highest credit on me. Whether it reflected any credit on Alice remains to be shown. All that the reader would have expected me to do in my situation, and more, I was longing, burning, dying to do. I besought Alice to let me come and meet her in the morning and conduct her to the scene of her daily labours. I begged her to meet me in the evening at the third lamp-post on the left as you go towards St. Sepulchre's, and let me see her home. I talked imploringly about dress-circle seats for

two (to take which my chain would have had to follow my watch), and my arrival at any given spot and time in a hansom cab to escort her to a theatre. I poured across that beer-slopped bar entreaties enough to melt a heart of stone that I might pursue the acquaintance at closer range. But it was all in vain. The invariable answer was to the effect that her pa (that's what she called him) would not like it, and had a dreadful temper, and was sure to find out, and that she had given him her solemn promise never to meet a gentleman. This last remark was of course to be taken in a figurative or rather technical sense, and implied meeting a gentleman for the purpose of listening to professions of love. Alice being in my eyes of fancy on a pedestal of virtue as well as beauty, as well as to my ordinary eyes located behind the obstacle so often mentioned *ante*, I honoured her for her high-minded conduct as a daughter, though with the inconsistency of human nature I regarded her father as a hard-hearted tyrant.

How long this state of affairs might have lasted if something had not occurred that did occur, how much of that prescribed waiting period of between nine and ten years might have slipped away while I still took my prolonged daily lunch in Newgate Street, exhausted my very slender exchequer, dreamed my day-dream, neglected my legal studies, and adored Alice Simpson, can never be known now. That is a self-evident proposition, but it is meant for moralising, and I must ask to have it accepted as such. It paves the way to the *dénouement*.

One day I became possessed of a private box at the Adelphi Theatre, one of the snug private boxes that used in those days to run all round the back of the dress circle.

It was given to me by one of our clerks who used to hang upon the fringe of the dramatic profession out of office hours. His possession of it, and his willingness to bestow it upon me, implied in a double way that the piece was a failure, though I did not see it then, nor does the fact bear upon my tale in the least. The material fact is that I had the box, and that I placed it on the counter before Alice, and commenced my two hundred and forty-fifth assault upon her impregnable resolution not to see me outside the restaurant. But before I could shape a few well-chosen sentences in which I meant to refer to the state of my heart once more, to the fact that the Adelphi Theatre was quite in the first rank of the West-End theatres, and to the great ease and luxury in which two people might occupy a box large enough for four—before, I say, I had time to clothe these sentiments in fitting language Alice interposed and said that she should like very much to go if her sister and a friend might come too.

The presence of others was not in my programme, as may be supposed, but any passing disappointment on that score was swallowed up in my joy at the thought that Alice had at last consented to spend an evening in my company. I felt that it was the thin end of the wedge, the successful storming of whatever has to be stormed first when you do storm.

The details were soon arranged, and on the eventful evening I was actually permitted by previous arrangement to call in a four-wheeled cab for Alice, her sister, and the friend, at Alice's own parents' address in Shoreditch, which she told me for the first time. She also told me that they (the parents) knew all about it and did not mind a bit.

This sounded to me almost like a blessing upon our union, and as for my own parents, I felt sure I could overcome their opposition in time, and I did not propose to mention the matter to them for five or six years, so that I might be able to point to the length of my attachment as evidence that it was unchangeable.

With many flutterings of heart, and gulps in the throat, and inward searchings as to my personal appearance, I drove up to the door in evening dress with an enormous bouquet for Alice, and quite a little crowd assembled when I got out and made for the door with my bouquet, because Shoreditch is not accustomed to the sight of young gentlemen in evening dress carrying such articles, or at all events was not then. Moreover, public curiosity may have had zest added to it on seeing me enter in that condition a very modest and unmistakable public-house. Yes, I cannot disguise that Alice was, as I then discovered, the daughter of a Shoreditch publican. I was intended to ring at a side-door which led to the private apartments of the family, but in my agitation I went straight through the public entrance, and found myself in the company of two cab-drivers and a few other persons of bibulous aspect whom I very much astonished by my appearance. I backed out hastily just as they were recovering self-possession, and beginning to hail me in a manner not befitting my dignity, and I got into the street to find Alice and her sister and the friend on the pavement. They had seen me and the cab from an upper window and had descended. Alice and her sister (who was like her, but not nearly so transcendently beautiful) were visions in muslin and other evening accessories, not omitting a plentiful

amount of jewellery which I thought very fine at the time, though I question now whether it would have attracted a burglar ; and the friend to whom I was introduced was a young man with ginger whiskers, an awful voice, and a terrible accent. He was, and he was not, in evening dress ; that is to say, he had on a white tie and black clothes, but the tails of his coat were not swallow-tails, and it was, not to put too fine a point upon it, a morning suit of the undertaker species. This was a blow, especially as the ticket said that evening dress was indispensable, but I may say at once that the friend passed scrutiny at the doors. It must indeed have been a failure that piece.

Alice had been reticent about the friend, and at first I did not even know whether it was man or woman, but when I learnt it was a man I guessed at once that it was in reality the sister's lover, and Alice smiled when I hazarded that conjecture, and said she shouldn't wonder. So I had it all settled in my mind that the sister and the friend would be wholly absorbed in each other's society while Alice and I would never take our respective eyes off each other.

A brief introduction took place in the street, in which the public appeared to take a great, but I am bound to add not a respectful interest, and we then huddled into the cab, and moved off to the sound of a cheer, which I much fear was derisive.

I felt a little shy, as being the youngest of the party, and, so to speak, the host, and in addition to this I was beset with doubts all through the journey as to what view might be taken by the authorities at the theatre on the subject of the ginger-whiskered friend's very far from indispensable

evening dress. It is also the fact that at the best of times conversation in a four-wheeled cab is difficult to maintain at high pressure. A hand may be squeezed effectively, but somehow Alice had got out of range, for she was neither beside me nor immediately opposite to me. I do not know the correct mathematical expression, and merely therefore put it to the reader as a problem to find the relative positions of self and Alice in that cab, assisting him or her to the extent of stating that the sister sat opposite to me and Ginger Whiskers next to me.

This was a small matter compared to the trials that awaited me when we got into my box—my box, not the box of Ginger Whiskers, but mine. Not only did Alice look at the piece instead of me, not only did she “sssssh” at me when I sought to murmur tender words so that she only should hear them, not only did she move her hand away dexterously whenever I pounced on it, not only did she interpose bits of chair and sister and Ginger Whiskers between me and her whenever I attempted a siege movement—not only this, but Alice and sister and Ginger Whiskers talked incessantly *to each other* when not attending to the play, and upon subjects foreign to my knowledge, and Ginger Whiskers assumed an air of easy familiarity to them, and general proprietorship of the box and the ladies in it, that was positively indecent. Hardly any attention was paid to me—me the patron of the evening—in fact none at all, except when I proposed libations and ices, of which an inordinate quantity were consumed at my expense. I was neglected to an extent that hurt my tenderest feelings deeply, and pangs unspeakable were added to my lacerated bosom when I beheld

Alice quite as familiar and friendly with G. W. (for full name see *ante*, it is too painful to go on repeating it) as her sister, and if anything more so. To say that I suffered horribly is to convey only a most inadequate idea of what manner of evening I passed.

When the play was over—it was a tragic play, but light comedy to what had been going on in a certain private box—I sought to conduct Alice forth, but her sister made a grab at my arm, and I emerged with her in that position, and Alice behind, with her arm nearly up to the elbow through that of Ginger Whiskers. Another crushing blow to my hopes.

Then came the return journey. I had proposed to conduct the party home, and had delicately hinted that I might perhaps be allowed to come in for a few minutes, but Alice, while accepting the first offer, had assured me that pa wouldn't think of allowing a gentleman into the house at that time of the evening, and that we must say good-bye at the door of her abode. So we journeyed back to Shoreditch again in a four-wheeler. Here again I was intending to suggest two hansoms, but the sister adhered to me like a barnacle, and to take her in a hansom was not at all the idea. I was, therefore, again placed in the same position as regards Alice in a four-wheeler, and I again paid for the cab; and when we got out the three bolted into the house like rabbits and hardly said good-night. I say the three, and I mean it, for pa's objection to gentlemen coming in evidently did not extend to Ginger Whiskers. I thought bitterly of this as I stood on the pavement alone and heard giggling inside the door as the party closed it, and I said to myself savagely that perhaps

pa did not object to G. W. on the ground that he certainly was not a gentleman, whatever he was. I nearly hissed it through the keyhole in my baffled misery.

I returned home, a wretched being, that night, terribly hit in the pocket by the expenses, grievously shaken and hurt in my most sensitive feelings by the heart-breaking disappointment, and the conviction which kept rising before me as a spectre that Alice did not, could not love me, or she would have behaved more affectionately and have eaten fewer ices. And after a sleepless night I resolved to punish her by staying away from the luncheon bar for several days, and to allow her thus to wonder what had become of me, and whether perhaps I was floating in the Thames a victim of heartless neglect on the part of a loved object.

I did stay away—one—two—three days. It was a sore struggle, and several times I walked more than half-way to Newgate Street and then forced myself to turn back. On the fourth day I could stand it no longer, and in I went with my heart in my mouth. Was I dreaming, or was another young woman behind the bar in Alice's place, a young woman with no pretensions to beauty and an exaggerated urbanity of manner, a young woman who called me "young gentleman," and asked what she could get for me in a peculiarly dreadful arch manner? I looked so utterly, vacuously, astonished, and struck all of a heap, that the proprietor's wife, who I suppose had watched my demeanour in the altered circumstances with some curiosity, came along the Bar and spoke.

"Were you expecting Miss Simpson? Didn't she tell you?"

"Tell me what?" I answered faintly.

"Tell you she was leaving here yesterday—she gave a week's notice last week."

I suppose I gasped out or looked an inquiry as to why she had left, or where she had gone, for the woman went on: "She left to be married to a young man she had been keeping company with some time. 'E never came 'ere and I don't know 'is name even, but my 'usband saw 'em together in the street one hevening when the young man 'ad waited outside to see 'er 'ome, which 'e did every hevening, and 'e said the young man was nothing particular to look at."

"Did your husband happen to say what the man was like?" I murmured.

"No. I don't think 'e took no notice. Yes, 'e did say that 'is whiskers was ginger-coloured."

I rushed from the restaurant, mad with love, rage, hate, misery, despair.

.
I walked about for hours, like one distracted.

I very nearly jumped over Waterloo Bridge.

I had done with this cold, heartless world.

Woman spelt perfidy.

I would never so much as take a passing interest in any woman again as long as I lived—if I decided to live at all.

For weeks I went about hiding within my breast a broken heart.

For weeks I hardly spoke a civil word at home or abroad.

After a period (not a very long period) of unutterable misery I began to realise that there were other fish in the sea.

Then it dawned upon me that Alice was a good bit older than I was.

Then it forced itself upon me that an alliance with a barmaid, following a previous engagement of nine or ten years, might not have been the best possible thing for me, or a source of unalloyed rejoicing to my family.

Then it struck me that after all Alice had never committed herself to me in any way, and that, saving for a readiness to accept gifts, which was natural with a fool at one end and a barmaid at the other, she had in fact rather staved off my advances. See how philosophy was gradually shedding its mantle over me.

Then I was glad she had married Ginger Whiskers instead of me.

Then I took up my neglected legal studies with a smitten conscience, and worked like a Trojan.

But I kept the affair very dark, and never revealed to living soul the cause of my strange and highly objectionable demeanour towards my family and friends during that bad time, not even to an anxious mother, who would fain have given me comfort if I had lifted so much as a corner of the curtain that concealed my bitter thoughts and morbid looks. Indeed, I may go so far as to say to you, my reader, that you are absolutely the first person to whom a secret, pickled and preserved for more than thirty years, has been at last laid bare.

FORGIVEN GREATLY

AT a period of English history too remote for the fact to have found place in any authentic chronicles, I lived in a set of chambers on the top floor of a building in Barnard's Inn, Holborn. It may be presumed that I was young, and that I had no money either to speak of or to chink in my pocket. How I earned a modest living does not concern the dear reader, nor is it material to the present narrative, but, to nip in the bud any inferences that might otherwise be drawn, I may incidentally mention that I did not receive stolen goods ; that I was not a member of a long firm, or, for that matter, any firm at all ; that I did not reproduce imitations of lost pages in old books with intent to enable dealers in the same to deceive the public with an alleged perfect copy of the first edition ; that I was not a company promoter of the baser sort, or any sort ; that I did not write begging letters for myself or any one else ; that I did not utter counterfeit coin, or anything worse than an occasional cry of despair, and then only because the British public did not recognise my claims to be regarded as one of the most remarkable young men of that or any other time. I have mentioned, I believe, all the principal crimes, but if there be any more, please note that I did not, to use the terrible clipped form of composition in favour with some lawyers, "commit same," and that my occupation, if not lucrative,

was honest and laborious. So much concerning myself—perhaps too much, because very little that follows relates to me.

Opposite to me, on the same landing, was one O. Smoothy. For a long time I was only aware of his existence by the name on the door, and as it was reported to me by a certain Mrs. Stride, the lady who did for us both (I use the word "did" actively in so far as it has a meaning signifying to plunder or over-reach, and derisively so far as it implies the rendering of any duty or service), that he was "a holderly gent," I came to regard the "O" as standing for old, and to call him Old Smoothy, if you can be said to call a person anything when you never speak to him or of him, and merely go through a mental process in dubbing him with any particular name. When I did later on see him in the flesh, I confirmed the idea of "holderly" as being accurate, because I was young, but in fact he was only middle-aged, and I now consider middle age the prime of life. I am middle-aged myself.

He was an extraordinarily quiet, solitary man. He slept in the chambers that he tenanted, but he was never there in the daytime. He would glide in at night and stay there, and then disappear again in the morning after a very frugal breakfast, and go I knew not whither. His rooms were littered with papers, scattered on tables and chairs, and there was even an overflow meeting on the floor, and the papers were as dusty as if the chambers had been locked up for years. I know this partly because, to my shame be it said, I, in a moment of irrepressible curiosity, looked in at the open door one day when the lady above alluded to was making a bare-faced pretence of dusting the chambers,

and partly because she imparted to me, in a tone of some mortification and personal injury, that Mr. Smoothy would not allow a thing to be touched, and that the place was like a blessed pigstye. I do not know why that of all things should have annoyed her of all people, but it did.

It may be true that the name of woman is curiosity, but I am disposed to think that even the far nobler and more majestic animal man shares that one weakness with her. I confess, at all events, that I very much wanted to know Smoothy for no better reason than that he did not seem to want to know me ; that the very fact of learning that he would not have his papers touched lent to him a weird sort of interest in my eyes ; and that his solitary life and long absence during the day and late return at night suggested to me all sorts of possible occupations of a mysterious kind. I pictured him as the public executioner, as a sandwich man, as a pavement artist, as a harmless lunatic evolved out of a family Chancery suit, as a poet who had been vainly trying all his life to get something published, and would not allow Mrs. Stride to touch his manuscripts because he thought they were sacred, though nobody else did. I even thought of him as the conductor of an academy for young gentlemen, such as Mr. Fagin used to carry on. I never thought anything good of him, barring the poetic theory, until I had met him face to face.

Some months elapsed before I even saw him, more before we exchanged a word, but it was in the nature of things that two men occupying chambers immediately facing each other at the top of a narrow staircase, should run against each other sooner or later. On the first occasion of our doing so I caught sight of his coat tails a flight of stairs

above me, and on the next he followed me at a distance of a few stairs behind me, and then I met him coming up the stairs as I came down them. That happened two or three times before we spoke, but I took in as a matter of interest that he was a man with rather bent shoulders, and a thin, ascetic, clean-shaved face. His dress was of an old-fashioned kind, and looked as though it had done good service, and yet it did not give the idea of either personal neglect or poverty. He moved quickly and quietly, as one who desired to avoid observation, and to be allowed to go through the world alone, heeding no one himself, and seeking not to attract the notice of any fellow-creatures ; and when I fairly saw his face I felt ashamed of all my unfavourable conjectures about his occupation, for if ever there was a gentle soul, his eyes were windows that looked out of one.

It was I who spoke first, and I ventured on the highly original and stimulating remark, "Good evening," as we passed each other on the stairs. He gave me a startled look, and replying in exactly the same words, and a very gentle, attractive voice, "Good evening," he passed on. My next essay in conversation was like the advances made in exercise-books—that is to say, I produced the original "Good evening," and added, "cold, isn't it?" To this he answered, "Good evening ; yes, it is cold."

These overtures did not carry matters very far, but I was not daunted, for I really had a great desire now to know Mr. Smoothy, and, in justice to myself, I must add a desire in which the original motive of curiosity had given way to a feeling prompted by the sight of his sad, wistful face and wonderfully kind, expressive eyes. So I persevered, and

finally dropped a note through the slit in his outer door, in which I said that as we were such very near neighbours I would gladly improve the acquaintance if it would not be disagreeable to him, and that perhaps one evening, when he was at liberty, he would look me up, or allow me to come and see him.

The reply was a visit paid to me the very next evening, and the commencement of an acquaintance which was soon greatly valued by me. I found Mr. Smoothy to be a highly cultivated man, and though I was of a younger generation, and no companion for him, he seemed in his own quiet way to take to me, and to find pleasure in our occasional evening chats in his chambers or mine. He was very reticent as to his occupation, but I gathered soon that he had been given to literary pursuits, though such few words as gave me that information conveyed it only by inference, and as if it were a closed chapter in his life, except that he evidently had a fancy for keeping old manuscripts about him. He was very shy at first, and never altogether lost with me a timid, shrinking manner, though, in an odd sort of way, we became really intimate friends, and, in the cock-sure judgment of youth, I set him down as a nice, harmless, scholarly, old fellow, and a true gentleman, but of a very weak and irresolute disposition. The unerring accuracy of my then profound knowledge of human nature, as exemplified in the last item of my conclusions about Mr. Smoothy, may or may not appear later.

Not very long after we had established those relations I noticed a change in Mr. Smoothy. He stayed away to a later hour in the evening than had been his habit, he excused himself several times from spending an hour with me

now and then, according to our custom, and when I did see him he was obviously in mental abstraction and distress, controlled with great difficulty even in my presence. His face had grown many shades sadder, and in his eyes particularly was the look of a man in sore trouble.

He did not invite my confidence, and the disparity in our ages, and the instinctive respect amounting almost to reverence which I felt for him, forbade me to blunder into forbidden ground. I only ventured to hint that he was not looking well, in the hope of drawing some answer that I might follow up without being indelicate; but while thanking me in his usual gracious, timid manner, he declared that there was nothing at all the matter with him, and then turned the conversation gently aside. That there was something preying very seriously on his mind was, however, perfectly clear, and it worried me that I was so powerless to help him in any way.

One morning, after this condition of affairs had lasted a week or perhaps longer, Mrs. Stride was laying my breakfast for me—the *pièce de résistance* being a kippered herring, which was not merely a kipper, but, if I may create the superlative, a kippest, and odoriferous beyond words—when she broke out with the remark that it was very odd it was, and she hoped there was nothing wrong, as with all his messy ways about his papers he was a quiet gent, and always polite.

I asked what was odd, and who was the gent.

“Why, Mr. Smoothy to be sure. ’E aint been ’ome all night, and I never knowed ’im stop away before without sayin’ so the day previous, and that, as I might say, ’as only been once in a blue moon.”

I told Mrs. Stride that no doubt Mr. Smoothy would turn up all right, and was quite able to take care of himself, and then attacked the kipper with what appetite I might, and tried to think of something else. Something else was named Mildred if I remember right, or it might have been during the time of Alice. The queens of my heart reigned for comparatively short periods, and I cannot now always place them exactly in order of date. But not even the attractions of the reigning beauty (they were all beautiful, and every one of them ultimately married another) could put out of my mind a sense of uneasiness about Mr. Smoothy. I realised that I had grown very fond of him, and should feel it acutely if any evil happened to him, and I carried that feeling about all day. It chanced that I had an evening engagement from which I came back too late to learn whether he had returned.

I was still further disturbed in mind the next morning when Mrs. Stride, while placing before me two boiled eggs—oh! such eggs, such Metropolitan, elderly, experienced, knowing eggs—told me with a face of real concern that Mr. Smoothy was still absent, and she could not make it out anyhow, and was really afraid something had happened to him. Her alarm communicated itself to me, and as I wrestled with the first egg (the second I left for some one with a less sensitive stomach, and conjectured that Mrs. Stride would come within the definition) I thought of all manner of possible accidents that might have happened to my friend, and even scanned the newspaper with a vague idea that I might find in it an account of some catastrophe in which he might be involved. With a heavy heart I was just opening my outer door to go forth

to my labours when a lad reached my floor with a letter in his hand. It was addressed to me, and on opening it I found a brief note from Mr. Smoothy, with no address. He merely said in it that a very urgent reason had kept him away from his chambers and might prevent him from returning for some days, and asked of me the favour to put together for him a few necessaries of clothing—with directions as to what was wanted, and where I should find it, and in what it could be packed—and to hand the same to the bearer, who would wait. Nothing more.

I did as I was asked, and then heard no more of Mr. Smoothy for a week or so. I missed him greatly—more than I could have believed possible—and was sitting in my room one evening feeling quite disconsolate, when a tap came at the door, which I at once recognised, and I bounded up to let in Mr. Smoothy. He it was sure enough, but altered almost beyond recognition, and wearing deep mourning. I have never seen such a grief-stricken face among the many that I have looked on since, and my heart ached for him as he clasped my hand and sat down wearily, oh ! so wearily, in his accustomed chair.

He said nothing for a little time, and I felt instinctively that it would be better for him to speak first and in his own time.

When he did find words they were at first so low and broken, and choked with the emotion against which he vainly struggled, that I could hardly catch what he said. But he gathered strength and courage as he went on. He spoke first in very kind and tender words of our having become such good friends, and of my caring, as he put it, to make a companion of a man so much older than

myself. And then he said that a great and irreparable trouble had befallen him, and that alone as he was in the world, he was moved for the relief of his own heart and by my kindness to him always, to tell me of his trouble if it would not be very selfish of him to inflict it upon me. I assured him most truly, and with all the earnestness of which I was capable, that I felt most deeply for him in a sorrow that I could see only too well was heart-breaking, and that if he gave me his confidence I would respect it faithfully, and honour his friendship if possible more than ever.

He paused a little as if to collect his thoughts and summon his courage, and then told me his story. When he had finished it, and I had spoken the few halting words of attempted comfort that came to my lips, and pressed both his hands in mine as he left me, the dawn of a summer's day was beginning to steal into my chambers.

And this was Mr. Smoothy's story.

He had married improvidently and hastily, when young, a beautiful girl of greatly inferior rank in life to his own, to whom he was tenderly attached. His precarious means of supporting her had been derived from literary work of an uncertain and not very lucrative kind, but she was at first proud of being the wife of a real author ; he was, on his side, full of ambition to become a successful writer for her sake. Success did not, however, come as rapidly as he had hoped, and the pinch of comparative poverty, and the inability of a shallow, uneducated mind to understand and appreciate either him or his constant toil, that seemed to produce so little return in money, began before very long to make the wife embittered, and the husband for that reason disappointed. She wanted fine dresses, holidays, amusements,

pleasures, and hard as he worked he could not give them to her. Children might perhaps have helped matters, but their only child died in infancy. Then, while she was still in the pride of her beauty, and all the illusions of a marriage in which she had found no lasting happiness had vanished, there came along a rich young man who became acquainted by chance with Mr. Smoothy, because the rich man dabbled in that which was the stern occupation of the poor man, and pretended to write poetry, and to be highly intellectual. Mr. Smoothy did not take very kindly to him, and, indeed, there was nothing in common between them to create a real friendship, but somehow the acquaintance spread sufficiently far to take in Smoothy's unhappy wife. And then after a time his house was left unto him desolate, and the wife who had not gained what she had expected and married for, and probably had never even at first had any real affection for her husband, eloped with the rich trifler in literature, to seek in the jingling of his money and the protestations of his unlawful admiration and love—but not to find, poor fool, nor any other poor fool in this world like unto her—the happiness that she had never patiently tried to win in the common round of a pure domestic life.

The blow had fallen heavily on the deserted husband, for though he had seen only too plainly that his wife was not all that he had pictured to himself, and that she fretted sorely against the restrictions of a slender income, he had buoyed himself up with the hope of winning success that would bring money, and with it the means of making his wife contented and happy, and he still cared for her, though his eyes had been opened to her faults.

He pursued his labours because he lived by them, but all

ambition had gone, and he was content to become a literary hack, and to earn a small income just sufficient to support him in the lonely and retired existence that he deliberately chose for himself, until he succeeded to a moderate competence that came to him quite unexpectedly from a distant relative, and then he gave up writing, except now and again in a fitful way, for it was no longer necessary, and he had lost all zest for it.

He had taken no steps to obtain a divorce. He would have done so if it would have paved the way for his wife to marry her betrayer and lead a reputable life, but not many months—not even many weeks—after she had left him he received an incoherent letter from her with no address. I gathered that it was an odd jumble of implied rather than expressed regret for her conduct to him, hatred for the false lover who had enticed her away with golden promises, and flung her aside when tired of her shallow attractions, and defiant recklessness as to the future. She asked nothing of him, not even his forgiveness, bade him to forget her, and declared that whatever might happen he might be sure that he would never be troubled by her.

On receiving this letter he had taken such limited steps as lay in his power to trace his unhappy wife, with a half-formed desire to do something—he knew not what or how—to save her from degradation and want. But he failed to discover the least trace of her, and many years elapsed before their paths crossed again.

And then a meeting did come to pass. He had contracted the habit, common to men who lead a solitary life, of wandering about the streets in all sorts of places and at all sorts of times, and it happened that he was making his

way late one evening along an East End London street, when his attention was arrested by the piercing scream of a woman at some distance ahead and the instant gathering together of a crowd. He had no morbid curiosity to learn what exact form of brutality had caused the excitement, but in the flash of a moment the cry went round, "Woman stabbed," and an instinct that he might possibly render help came upon him, and caused him to move towards the group, to which at the same time a policeman was making his way. The crowd gave way to the policeman, but were not disposed to admit any one else to a front place at what they appeared to regard as a gruesome kind of entertainment provided for their benefit, and Mr. Smoothy found himself, not unwillingly, shut out. He was about to walk away when another policeman came and ploughed his way towards his comrade, and a moment afterwards one of them made a lane unceremoniously through the crowd, having in charge a dark-visaged, ruffianly-looking scoundrel, who might have given a good deal of trouble if the bystanders had had any sympathy for him and had been inclined to aid his escape. But English people do not love the use of knives, and the brute seemed instinctively to feel that the policeman was rather a protection to his life and limbs than otherwise, owing to the threatening attitude of the people round him.

This incident split up the crowd into two sections, one pursuing the progress of the prisoner to the police station, and the other remaining with the victim of the savage assault, to whom the other policeman was attending as well as circumstances permitted. The circumstances included, as in all such cases, a determination on the part of the public to get as near a view of the sufferer as

possible, and to exclude from her every possibility of breathing air instead of being nearly suffocated by a crowd, moved, no doubt to a certain extent by sympathy, but also, I fear, influenced by that love of the morbid which infects the lower classes, and causes them to revel in reading the minutest details of an execution, and to regard with the highest favour entertainments which involve a risk of life to the performer.

A stretcher had been sent for, but meanwhile the unhappy sufferer was evidently in a bad way, and the humane policeman was vainly trying to get the people to stand farther back, while he supported the poor woman as well as he could. And then Mr. Smoothy was impelled to make his way into the centre of the crowd—he told me that he did this just as he had before lingered in a scene that was revolting to him, in obedience to an impulse to render such help to the policeman as he might, with some slight knowledge of the right thing to do in such a case before skilled aid could be summoned. He said something which inclined the people to appreciate his motive and make way for him, and, to his horror, found himself a moment afterwards kneeling on the pavement beside the prostrate body of his own wife.

She had fainted from loss of blood, and one glance was enough to tell him that she had been very severely hurt, and to realise also what had been her manner of life during the fifteen years that had passed since he had seen her last. As he assisted the policeman in such little offices of mercy as were possible, he debated within himself the terrible problem as to what he ought to do, and determined that he would not, at all events there and then, disclose the fact

that she was his wife. He knew that she would be well cared for in her extremity, and he felt that it would be wiser for the present, at all events, to play only the part of a humane stranger. It may be also that, unconsciously to himself, he shrank from acknowledging the existence of such a tie between himself and the woman who had sunk so very, very low since last he had looked upon her face, and if so, who shall cast a stone at him for that?

After a delay that seemed to him interminable a stretcher arrived, and the woman—his wife, as he kept saying to himself—was gently placed on it and taken off. He heard the policeman utter some words of thanks to him for his help, and mention the name of the hospital to which he was taking her, and then he found himself following also, until the hospital was reached, and the poor, unconscious burden disappeared from view. He walked away in a dazed condition, and then, and for many weeks afterwards, felt as if he were passing through a hideous dream.

But it was no dream. No dream that he had found his wife after many days. No dream that she had sunk lower and lower, steadily and surely, since first she had put her foot upon the downward slope. No dream that the motive of the crime of which she had been the victim was jealousy, created by unfaithfulness, according even to the code of the man with whom last she had thrown in her lot. No dream that her life was hanging in the balance for long, but was saved, though only as a shattered wreck, by skill and devoted care. No dream that a horrible trial took place, at which the crime and all its degraded surrounding circumstances were laid bare, as with a surgeon's knife, and a long term of penal servitude meted out to the miscreant, which

would have been longer still but for the previous conduct to him of the woman he had stabbed—and that woman Smoothy's own wife.

No, these were no dreams, but cruel waking realities that nothing could dissolve into air, and before him lay the future of this woman, and wrapped up with it, as he felt, his own.

Without betraying his identity he made daily inquiries as to her progress at the hospital, and when at length her life was out of danger, he found means to provide anonymously, and as a temporary measure, a decent abiding-place and other necessaries for her, with the friendly and delicate help of one of the surgeons, who knew nothing and asked nothing of Mr. Smoothy's reasons for solicitude on her account, whatever he may have conjectured, and who told him that she might live for many years (how often he repeated to himself "many years," as he paced the streets or sat in his lonely chambers, with a stunned feeling of blank despair as to the future), but that she could never again be otherwise than a chronic, and practically bed-ridden, invalid, owing to special mischief caused by the would-be assassin's knife.

Much as he doubted what course to take, it never entered his contemplation to leave her to want. Had she recovered full health and strength, he felt that he would have tried to save her from perdition. As it was, the problem took a different but not less difficult form, for it was impossible to say what manner of human being in thought and feeling she would become after this great shock, when she came gradually to realise the altered conditions of her life. The friendly surgeon had told him for his comfort that there

was one great saving clause—the indications all pointed to her not having been addicted to drink, and he hinted gently that this and her comparatively helpless physical condition made reformation of her life much more hopeful, though he did not conceal that she seemed at present to have no sense of shame or remorse, and was an ungrateful and difficult patient. She had shown no interest in anything but the trial of the man who had nearly murdered her, and no satisfaction about anything except the punishment meted out to him, and even that did not gratify her spirit of revenge, as she said it ought to have been twice as long.

What ought he to do? Should he remain always in the background as an unknown benefactor, or reveal himself to her? There were many and great reasons for the former course; indeed, from his own selfish point of view every reason. But his great and generous heart told him that his personal influence might help to raise this poor fallen wretch from the mire in which she had sunk until it had all but closed over her, and he felt in his inmost soul that a greater, far greater sacrifice was called for than any mere provision for her bodily wants made by him from afar off. If he would even try to bring back to repentance and then to peace this woman who had once been his wife, and had betrayed and disgraced him, and then fallen to the lowest depths of shameless guilt, he must dedicate his whole life to her.

And that was what Smoothy decided to do, and he told me that when he had once brought his courage to that point he seemed, as it were, to have won a big fight with himself, and never looked back with regret once afterwards.

He took the surgeon into his confidence, and obtained his advice as to the best way of providing permanently in a modest way for his wife's needs in her condition of health ; and then when she had been settled in the quarters he had provided for her, and an attendant had been installed, he went to see her.

He did not tell me much about that interview, the memory of which was evidently very painful to him even at the distance of time from which he was speaking. I gathered that the woman had shrunk from him one moment, defied him the next, accused him of coming there to revile her ; sworn that she would not have his charity, and would not have had it at all if she had known it was his ; cursed her own fate, and declared she would get well in spite of all the doctor said, and then go her own way and have no spies about her, and if she chose to do so, die in a ditch. Her language was garnished with oaths of the foulest kind, and Smoothy was for the moment sorely shaken even as to the wisdom of his resolution. But behind all the flaunting, coarse brutality of her bearing and language, all the hardness of heart, and all the vile habits of thought that had grown with her life until they had become part of herself, something whispered to him that there was just a faint glimmering of shame, evinced by the very vehemence of her language and her fierce desire to reject his help of all help in the world, and when he left her he felt terribly cast down, but not in utter despair. Her last words were almost a shout, bidding him to go and return no more, and a defiant repetition of her intention to get well and be off where no one could follow her.

He left her alone advisedly for a few days, and then he

went again. The meeting was nearly as painful and of much the same kind, but he was conscious again, and in a more marked degree, that a feeling of shame was trying to pierce through the tangled heap of evil thoughts that possessed her shallow and brutalised brain, and that her repeated assertions that she would soon get well, and, as she called it, give him the slip, did not sound as if there were real conviction behind them.

Again at a still longer interval he went, and that time it seemed to him that the poor creature revealed, all against her will and in spite of many defiant assertions volunteered to the contrary, a dim consciousness on her part of having been lonely, and of having even looked forward to his coming.

And then again and again he went, until the first great step was won, and she was undisguisedly glad to see him. His face brightened as he told me of this triumph ; he did not also tell me how it had been brought about, and never referred to his own part in those terrible interviews between man and wife with such a tremendous gulf between them. But, as I looked at his face, I had no difficulty in picturing for myself the infinite patience and restraint that had broken down such a barrier and conquered such a nature.

There were many hills still to climb, he said, and it took a long time to mount them. From defiance to shame, from shame to gratitude, from gratitude to repentance, from repentance to peace and contentment with the daily life of an invalid. And beyond these, always in evidence, and always to be reckoned with, the limitations of an uneducated and very narrow mind, to which his cultivated intellect had to

stoop in reading to her, in talking to her, in laying out his own life so as to bring such gleams of happiness as were possible into hers, with its dreadful past behind her and its bed-ridden prospect before her. But he never flinched or failed, and the time came before very long when his daily visit brought to the poor soul a light that was to her as if an angel shed it upon her, and his reward was the knowledge that it was so. He found, too, that her method of expression, her thoughts, her whole nature gradually became refined and softened, until at length what had been to him a duty of infinite trial and difficulty, insensibly filled up his life with the purest and truest happiness. It was as though in spirit husband and wife were united for the first time, and not even in the fleeting days of early life, when he had been first led away by her beauty into the fatal mistake of a most ill-assorted marriage, was she one-hundredth part as dear to him as now, when, with sins upon her as red as scarlet, helpless, and with no vestige or shadow of personal beauty remaining, she lay upon a bed of suffering, never to be raised from it until the end should come that was very gradually but very surely closing in upon her.

For more than ten years had Smoothy devoted himself to the sacred task, and then the summons came that finished it.

She had always suffered much from the original cause, and although she had borne her sufferings heroically for his sake, and no word of complaint ever escaped her in his presence, he had seen for himself that her strength was visibly declining, and the doctor privately told him that a fresh complication had arisen to baffle him. His recent absence was due to his constant and devoted care for her

during the last few days of her life. And now all the sufferings were over, and the poor bruised and broken spirit was at rest. She had died in his arms—restored to them again at that supreme hour—in love purified and made holy by the fire of suffering and repentance, and filled with the peace that passeth all understanding; and in her last conscious moment she had breathed his name with a blessing on her lips and a look in her poor wasted face that seemed to him to have come straight from Heaven to tell him that angels, whose names were Love and Mercy, were waiting to receive her at the gates.

It soon became evident to me that the withdrawal from his daily life of the absorbing interest to which he had given up his time and his thoughts, and in the later days also his deep affection, was an irreparable loss to Smoothy. He seemed to shrink into the appearance of old age by degrees that were almost daily perceptible. There was the same patient, quiet, uncomplaining face, but the light had gone out of it. He moved about as a man without purpose, and that is what he really had become. I am glad, looking back, to believe that when I made use of little artifices to get him to come into my room, and then led him to open his heart to me by talking of the one subject that had so filled his whole being, he was more nearly happy than at any other time; but all my efforts to tempt him to take up literary work again as an occupation were in vain.

Grief proverbially does not kill, but when the whole aim and object of a man's life, to which he has given everything and sacrificed everything, and in which he has been

absolutely wrapped up are suddenly swept away, and when this happens comparatively late in life, after the pulses that quicken ambition, hope, and eager expectation of what lies in front of him have ceased to beat, it is not very rare for that man's life just to fade away as a thing that is done with. So at least it was with my dear friend Smoothy, and the grave had not closed over his dead wife for more than a year when he followed her, and by his own express wish, which it was my privilege as his executor to carry out, he was laid beside her. Their friendship at the last had been beautiful, and in death they were not long divided.

CONCERNING JUDGES

To make the dry bones of law reports live would seem at first blush a miracle of no ordinary merit, and yet they have a strange human interest to those who pause now and again upon the dusty road of professional life and sit down to moralise, always provided that they have reached that stage of the journey at which they look rather back upon the distance already covered than forward to the uncertain and seldom inviting prospect stretching out before them. And who does not moralise sometimes and find a melancholy pleasure in doing so? It costs nothing. It gives a sort of rest or pause in the turmoil of business life, with all its worry and anxiety, its perpetual contact with and (if we must own up at times even on week-days) voluntary contributions to the demons of envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness, to say nothing of petty jealousies, sordid meanness, and a few other minor imps. I know that whenever a man utters a sentiment not absolutely limited to the grovelling affairs of daily life, and that has in it the least tinge of deeper reflection, it is assumed as a matter of course that his liver is out of order and that he is in need of a purgative. But whether my liver is responsible for the line of thought that I am tempted to pursue in this paper or not is perfectly immaterial to me, and, if possible,

more immaterial to the reader. I am thus tempted, and I mean to fall, and that is all about it.

I do not seek, now at all events, to evolve anything out of the words of wisdom reported in print which generally send away one of two suitors happy and an enthusiastic admirer of justice "as she is spoke," and the other miserable and convinced (not without reason at times) that the law is an ass, and not even a consistent ass. I do not even turn my thoughts to the reporters, though whether they be young barristers eagerly looking in front of them, or elderly barristers sadly or philosophically looking behind them, they are by no means without interest for the student of human nature. I am thinking of the judges whose names appear in the reports.

The impression that a solicitor's principal function in life is to wait obsequiously upon judges and counsel in Court and to tip ushers does not hold, I think, among enlightened people either inside or outside of the legal profession, though I have in my time known even judges to whom it has appeared to be an article of religion. I have in a paper that will be found later in this immortal volume unfolded the miseries of attendance in Court, and there are, I think, at least some who realise that to a solicitor of mature age the necessity for ever putting in an appearance in Court is regarded as an intolerable nuisance and a dead loss, and that it recoils upon his family circle in the shape of a display of unmerited irritation shortly before, and during, and for some time after the event. But I suppose, nevertheless, that to most of us in either branch of the profession a reverie will bring back more vividly than anything a ghostly procession of judges who have been

seen and known by us, whose wisdom and learning have been admired, or whose foibles have been, not always kindly, ridiculed or abused, and who are now beyond the reach of the criticism that beats pretty fiercely upon the bench which they once occupied.

When I was a very small child and was first taken to church, I thought the clergyman was an angel because he was dressed in white; and when I first went to a circus I thought the lady who appeared on horseback in muslin and scanty accessories was a real fairy. When again I was a very young articled clerk and went into Court for the first time, I thought that the judge to whose utterances I listened was a lineal successor to Solomon, because he had a deep, rich voice and solemn manner. He did, as a matter of fact, talk terribly bad law at times and foolishness beyond price, but I appreciated the voice then, and did not detect the bad law or the foolishness. All these opinions have been modified, but still, even in these latter days, I have known clergymen not very far short of being angels, and have seen circus ladies who might very well pass in a crowd for fairies, and judges for whose wisdom, patience, and courtesy (and of these three things courtesy is by no means the least, and seems the judicial virtue most difficult to practise) I have had the most profound respect and admiration.

The spirit of the *laudator temporis acti* is always with us, and always will be, and he takes up a position with an invisible brush in hand and tars us with it just at the spot at which we pass the meridian of life and begin to descend the hill that leads down to the valley of silence and rest, from which no man has ever yet emerged except those raised from the dead. Until then we may have had the

impression that the world has been moving on, that men and women are rather better than they used to be, that it is an age of advancement and progress even in the administration of justice, that the judges of to-day will bear comparison with any that have ever adorned the bench in times past. But when we get to that point on the road to which I have just alluded, we begin to recall Lord Chief-Justice A. and Lord Justice B. and Baron C., whom we remember in our youth, and as we turn over a law report we light on some well-remembered name of a judge who has long since gone to the land of Shadows, and we say to ourselves, “What a great judge he was, and how well I remember trembling before him in stage-fright the first time I ever went before a judge in chambers, and how kindly he helped me, and what a splendid judgment he delivered in that case of Stiggle and Timpkins—which, by-the-bye, we won hands down. Fancy comparing him to any of the judges of to-day.” We pay no heed to the trifling circumstance that we were thirty years younger when we formed our opinion of the late lamented judge, and were, so to speak, always following in his wake, whereas we hardly know by sight the judges of the present time, or at most only identify them with counsel whom we used to employ as juniors when we were very young, and when we thought we knew everything ourselves, and at all events more than they did.

It is a truism that to establish a comparison like must be compared with like, but apart from the objects compared (I hope it is not contempt of court to call judges objects if meant without offence) the comparison must be made under equal conditions by the person who affects to compare them. A lawyer who has, let us say, been in the pro-

fession five-and-thirty years will be heard to assess the merits of some judge of to-day against those of another judge who departed this life when the critic was himself about twenty-one years of age, very much of course to the disadvantage of the former. He is talking sheer nonsense, and might as well say that I must evidently have lost all sense of enjoyment (I have nearly, but that does not touch the point) because he no longer sees me wheeling a hoop, and he distinctly remembers my fondness for that pastime when I was seven. The truth lies, as it often does, about half-way between the two extremes. The very young lawyer clothes the judges of his day with exaggerated virtues ; the old lawyer is given to stripping them of any virtues at all, and unconsciously casts a glamour over the judges of his youth. There have been good and indifferent judges in all times, and I fancy that the average has always been about the same, at all events since the far-off days when judges used to be expected to decide particular cases according to the wish of some great person who was, metaphorically speaking, sticking pins into them from behind, and had given them to understand that it would be the worse for them if they did not do his bidding.

But if it be the case that the judges of old and the judges of to-day are much of a muchness in judicial virtue and merit when weighed evenly in the balances, and with a due allowance for the differences of the prevailing conditions of the time in which they have lived, it cannot be denied that there is a halo of sentiment round the judges who flourished in our youth that we cannot extend to those who are in years our contemporaries or juniors. The halo comes too late to afford much satisfaction to

those who are gone, but if it is any satisfaction to the present generation of judges, they may rest assured that many years hence, after they have delivered their own last judgments, and are waiting to hear the last judgment ever to be delivered, the young lawyer of to-day, grown grey by then in the service of his profession, will pronounce a highly favourable opinion upon their merits, and declare them to be incomparably superior to their successors. Thus all things right themselves sooner or later, but with a tendency to do so later, and sometimes too late for our personal gratification. I confess that I cannot thrill with excitement over the prospect, however certain it may be, of a statue being erected to my memory, or of my funeral being attended by a deputation from my old convivial friends, the Jolly Buffaloes, even if they be headed by a cornet (which I fully agree to be a funereal instrument) playing "The Lost Chord" in fitful gusts.

So let me have my sentimental regrets as I turn over law reports and light upon judicial names that were household words to me in days long gone by. Let me recall what a giant this judge was, what delicate wit illumined the judgments of another, what patience and conscientious longing to hold the scales of justice evenly distinguished another, how rough in manner and yet how kind in heart was another. Let me recall how constantly I used to have to be in attendance at some particular Chancery Court before some particular judge, and pause to remember that the Court has vanished as well as the judge, never to be seen again. Let me look at a print hanging on my wall with medallion portraits of all the judges of the time at which it was published, and whose faces were all familiar

to me, and shake my head as I tell myself that not one of them—not one—is alive to-day. And if all this does not make me sad enough, let me look back to the days when I was young, hopeful, ambitious, looking always forward eagerly to successes that I was striving to win, and to abundant happiness that I was certain I should possess, and let me find in that retrospect good and sufficient reason for closing this paper, with a sigh as deep as the well in which most of those hopes and expectations are lying alongside truth.

ANY READER
WHO IS
NOT DEEPLY INTERESTED
IN
THE SORROWS OF SOLICITORS AS A CLASS
AND
THE SACRED CAUSE OF LAW REFORM,
OR AT LEAST
ONE OF THOSE SUBJECTS,
IS RESPECTFULLY REQUESTED
TO
KEEP OFF THE REMAINING GRASS,
OR, IN OTHER WORDS,
STOP HERE.

ATTENDING COURT

THERE may be some benighted beings who, judging from totally mistaken premises, such as a resigned countenance, or a protruding waistcoat indicating to the thoughtless a jolly existence, most rashly conclude that the life of a solicitor is a happy one.

A more preposterous idea was never conceived. The path of a solicitor is positively strewed with sharp-pointed stones, and fenced in with barbed wire; he receives pin-pricks enough to tattoo him; he is insulted on every opportunity; ridiculed at every turn on and off the stage; held responsible by clients for the folly of legislators, the perversity and prejudices of juries, and the occasional lapses of judges; he has, of late years, generally been assumed to be on the verge of fraudulent bankruptcy in a large or small way, according to the extent of his practice. I really do not know what form of revenge is open to him, except to abstract the money of his clients and depart in a false beard to more congenial climes, and even that form of rough justice has been weakened by bothering extradition treaties.

I cannot hope in the compass of this paper to unfold all the woes of a legal practitioner, and I therefore concentrate attention upon a single one of them calculated to crush the bravest spirit, and I select the process of refined torture known by the name of attending Court.

Most of us are familiar with the spectacle of a perspiring, swearing, mud-stained man with a long stick endeavouring to persuade a drove of cattle to proceed over, let us say, Blackfriars Bridge while vehicles of all sorts throw them into wild confusion and terror, and afford them an excuse for going anywhere except in the right direction. That is a simile which gives a faint idea of what it means to collect and keep witnesses together in Court for a trial. The eminent expert witness is perpetually wanting to go off and tell untruths somewhere else at fifty guineas apiece. The witness of fact, if in a humble class of life, and especially if accustomed to go down to the sea in ships and have his business in great rum and waters, gravitates to refreshment bars. The silly witness loses himself whenever he ventures to move a yard out of Court. The restless witness wanders away into other Courts to hear what is going on, but, mercifully, may generally be run to earth in the Divorce Court. The officious witness occupies himself in thinking of new and totally irrelevant points, and either inscribes them on crumpled pieces of paper and passes them with an air of profound mystery to the solicitor, who has to pretend to read them and be deeply impressed, or else progs a stick or umbrella into the solicitor's back, and rests not until the latter struggles out of his seat and has the inane drivel poured into his ear in a hoarse and at times tobaccoey or oniony whisper. The inquisitive witness wants to know the name of the judge and the counsel in the case, and of that gentleman in a wig and gown that sits just below the judge, and what he is doing there—a terrible poser that last question.

The combative witness cannot hear any witness on the

other side give evidence without getting up excitedly and upsetting everybody and everything in his way to come and tell the solicitor, with a purple face and utterance choked with rage, that Jones is telling lies (with a prefix to the word lies), and it's awful to hear him, and that something ought to be done to stop it.

All the time this process is going on the solicitor has to attend simultaneously to the requirements of the Court and counsel, which are also harassing. He hands a document to his leading counsel at the imperious request of the latter, who already has had and lost two copies of it. The leading counsel immediately contrives to drop it under his seat, or fold it inside some other paper in his brief, or conceal it among the papers of the counsel sitting next to him. A minute or two afterwards it is required in evidence, and is not forthcoming. The judge looks impatiently at counsel, counsel assumes a pained air, as who should say: "My Lord, I am really very sorry the Court is kept waiting, but my fool of a client has mislaid the document, and it is not my fault," and he generally does say words to that effect. The judge, in an impersonal way, looking over the head of the solicitor as if he were dust and speaking to counsel, improves the occasion by remarking that if solicitors would only take the trouble to have documents in readiness that are certain to be wanted, valuable public time would not be lost, and there would be nothing more heard of the law's delays and arrears of cases waiting for trial; and that at the last meeting of the Rule Committee of the judges he suggested a rule for dealing with such flagrant scandals, and only regrets that it was not carried owing to nobody voting for it, and that if the document is not found in three minutes,

he shall know what to do about the costs of the action. The client, naturally misled by the brazen innocence of counsel, the solemn air with which words of apparent wisdom are being uttered from the Bench, and the fact that his solicitor does not present the appearance of a king of men while frantically searching for the missing paper, with a murderous expression of countenance and in a tumult of suppressed rage, feels that he has indeed made a bad choice of a legal adviser, and must change his solicitor after this case is over. Then, just as a crisis is coming, and the judge in a tone of crushing severity asks the ceiling how much longer the Court and jury are to be kept waiting (though he does not really care about the jury) the cup is found in Benjamin's sack—meaning the leading counsel's own papers—who immediately says, with a courage worthy of a better cause, that it must have been put there by his client without his noticing it, apologises to the Court for his client's carelessness, and the case proceeds.

The solicitor's shirt has gradually crept up his back in a compact roll from the working of his skin during the agony of this incident, his feelings are lacerated, he wants to say a bad word, but he can only mutter it to himself in a thoroughly unsatisfying and inconclusive manner; and while he is trying hard to recover his composure down comes the inquisitive witness upon him with a long scribble horribly written in faint pencil, conveying a preposterously silly suggestion upon a point that has no conceivable bearing upon any possible aspect of the case.

The relations of the solicitor to his leading counsel on these occasions are in other respects trying. I do not refer to the learned gentleman who has just taken silk, and not

having yet won his spurs as a leader cannot dig the rowels of them into the solicitor's flank. I have in my eye the type of successful king's counsel, who is one of the great advocates of the day. His attitude to the solicitor who briefs him generally ranges from good-humoured contempt to biting irritation. He is apt to regard an unfavourable answer from a friendly witness as a personal offence on the part of the solicitor, and to ask that crushed worm what he means by it. He complains aloud because in the course of the trial some fact comes out of which he declares he was never told, though it is prominently stated on the first page of his brief. Any expectation of more than a passing glimpse of his bodily presence is, like faith, the evidence of things not seen, for he is usually opening another case in King's Bench, Court 7, just as the solicitor, whose miseries I am describing, is stranded in the most critical stage of his case in King's Bench, Court 4, and sending up signals of distress like rockets from a sinking ship. His place on such occasions is taken by his clerk, who comes in and watches the case sympathetically, but without any obviously substantial advantage, and generally selects such moments as a fitting opportunity for mentioning confidentially that the other side have given Mr. Snooks, K.C., one hundred and fifty guineas on his brief, and he feels sure that he has only to tell you this in order to secure the immediate raising of your own leader's fee from one hundred guineas to the same figure.

Without being an epicure or glutton a man may be excused for wanting a little food in the middle of the day. At about 1.30 the judge experiences that need and rises. The leading counsel share it, and go off to their well-earned

repast. Not so the wretched solicitor. His client and witnesses come buzzing round to talk to him: they expect to be looked after like children, to know how long they may be away (they are always longer than the time mentioned), and where they can go for their confounded lunch; and how long the case is likely to last, and why on earth Mr. Fubsy, K.C., did not make that point which the person who is talking to you suggested himself, and therefore regards as the turning point of the whole case, though it is of no importance whatever, and whether you noticed that the judge's face showed plainly that he did not believe a word of Miffin's evidence on the other side. You are told as a tremendous secret that as the jury went out one of your witnesses heard a juryman say to another juryman that it was a rum case, and are asked whether you don't regard that as an infallible indication that your client, the defendant, must win. When you have waded through this sea of fatuous obstruction in the way of much-needed refreshment, you suddenly remember that your counsel asked you to look up yesterday's shorthand notes and find for him a certain passage in which he was sure somebody said something. So you have a turn at that, and as nobody said anything of the kind, it takes some time to exhaust the point. And then you seize your hat, and are about to put it on and rush for a sawdusty sandwich, when you perceive that in the course of your various struggles, and of the hurdle-chasing which takes place all day in the solicitor's well, the nap of your new Lincoln & Bennett has assumed the outward appearance of black astrachan, so you have to stop and brush it with your sleeve. And then, just as you are fairly getting off, in rushes one of your

clerks to tell you that a client has called at the office who said he must see you at all costs, and that he has been obliged to bring him up to court, and he is now walking up and down the passage waiting for you to come out. Curtain.

It may be thought that the solicitor's day in Court, of which I have tried to give some idea, has the compensation of being lucrative. If anybody has that impression I ask to be permitted, metaphorically speaking, to laugh savagely in his face. I restrain my noble rage sufficiently not to allow myself even to mention the contemptible sum for which I am expected to undergo these miseries. I only suffer myself to state in this sordid connection that a case in Court presents a horrid fascination to a solicitor's staff, insomuch that everybody in the office who can by hook or crook make the faintest excuse for dropping in is certain to come, and I have myself counted seven living persons to whom I have had the privilege of paying salaries come into Court in the course of the same case, thereby diluting to the point of small silver, if not of coppers, my own personal gain from discharging the painful duty of which I have endeavoured to give some description.

THE WEARING OF THE GOWN

[INTRODUCTORY NOTE.—The following address was delivered at a mass meeting of indignant solicitors held in Hyde Park not long before the publication of this volume. It is computed that 250,000 solicitors were present, and the proceedings were most enthusiastic. A strong force of police was on the ground, but their services were not needed, owing to the admirable conduct of the professional mob. There were a few cases of picking pockets, but, so far as could be seen, the thefts were not committed by the solicitors present, but by barristers and others who made their way into the meeting disguised in solicitors' gowns.]

IT is always desirable to avoid the language of exaggeration, but I suppose that no solicitor present at this great meeting is ignorant of the fact that our inferior, humble, and lowly branch of the legal profession is at the present moment shaken to its very foundations by a crisis, for the gravity of which no parallel is to be found in our contemptible history.

It is well known that most of us eke out a precarious living by means of advocacy in the County Courts of merry England. We have hitherto been permitted to appear before those tribunals in whatever garments we might choose to wear. Among these have been frock-

coats and morning-coats, and a short species of coat known usually by a name that my modesty will not allow me to repeat. We have worn tweed suits, serge suits, compound blends of originally distinct suits. All this promiscuous clothing has, according to our means and our taste, covered our bodies and concealed within its folds our ignorance of the most elementary principles of law. In this same modest and varied raiment we have endeavoured faithfully and to the best of our ability to defeat the ends of justice ; to browbeat witnesses in vulgar imitation of the worst traditions of the bar ; to quote authorities with uncertain appreciation of their meaning, and at times quite irrespective of their having any bearing at all upon the case in hand ; to address five jurymen of humble rank and decided local prejudices, as if they were the only five righteous persons in their district and positive fountains of wisdom and justice. We have done all this for a fee ranging from ten and sixpence to the coveted guinea, and occasionally dependent on results, and we have done it in our ordinary every-day clothes, perspiringly but coolly, humbly but proudly, viciously but amiably, ignorantly but with deep learning. We have made very little money at it, but we have been free as air—free to revel in the baggy knees of our trousers, the shiny elbows and backs of our coats, the imperfect starching of our dickies, the coy and spasmodic appearances of our mended braces, to be noticed by the close observer when an impassioned if irrelevant argument has raised the waistcoat above the Trinity high-water mark of the top button of the adjoining and very important garment.

How different has been this life of liberty to the thrall-

dom of the barrister ! He has been obliged to conceal all these signs of a free, if impecunious, Briton in the livery of wig and gown. Watch him hurrying from Court to Court, purporting with a matchless air of ingenuous if unsuccessful effort to attend exclusively to each of six cases all on at the same time. See his hampered movements as he attempts to skip along the corridors. Note him, more particularly in summer, as he tears at his gown and puts back the wig from his brow with the air of one who would give worlds to strip and address the Court in his under-wear. True, he may make more money than we poor attorneys who conduct cases from half-a-guinea upwards. But money is not everything, and sweet indeed is the freedom of your own coat, waistcoat, dicky, and pantaloons when weighed in the scales against the abject slavery of a wig and gown, even if those emblems of the serf be gilded with a substantial fee to him and also by an inscrutable dispensation—his clerk. But this priceless heritage of ours has been rudely assailed, for the edict has lately gone forth that Solicitors appearing in County Courts are in future to wear gowns. It was not enough that (in addition to barristers), pew-openers, ushers, vergers, and dissenting ministers have lost their birthright and appear in a servile and critical livery when discharging their respective functions. We who have never done harm to anybody ; we who would not so much as hurt a fly ; we who, though we may be generally fraudulent and supported largely by contributions of trust money belonging to our clients, are in all other respects virtuous and blameless citizens—we forsooth are not to raise our voices in the County Courts without first assuming this degrading robe.

What, I ask, is to be done in this grave professional emergency? Take my own humble case merely as typical of others. I am asked by a milkman to appear in a metropolitan County Court one day next week and support his claim against a customer, who, for excellent reasons, disputes his bill, and I am promised fifteen shillings if I win, and five if I lose. But I have no gown. I thought that an old black stuff dress of my mother might be adapted, but she declares that no alteration will make it encircle my waist, and that in any case it would be absurd to wear it without a bustle which she can lend me, and other aids to the figure which at all events she declares she cannot supply. It may be mistaken pride, but I shrink from any artificial additions to a manly presence of which I am not ashamed. On the other hand, the pew-opener at my church is enormous, and when I tried his gown on last Sunday after the congregation had filed out, I felt as if I had gone into the wholesale alpaca trade and was carrying all the stock about with me.

Then I went to a costumier and looked at a gown frequently hired out for use by the notary who comes in with a marriage contract in Act I., and is about to witness its signature by the hero and heroine when, in the interests of the remaining acts, disturbing causes result in its being torn up and the notary hustled out. I think that garment might have done at a pinch, but the terms were really too expensive, and would have left me hardly anything even out of my fifteen shilling fee, while I should sustain a positive loss if it were cut down to five shillings in consequence of my losing the case. That contingency, I may parenthetically say, is not remote, because my client can

only hope to pursue his milky way to success by means of perjury, and he does not look to me like a really satisfactory witness.

Of course, if I could gain a footing in one County Court and stick there, a private gown would be an investment of capital, as I should wear no coat under it or only my red golfing coat; but I only manage to get a County Court case now and then, and there are millions of solicitors to whom the same remark applies.

Again I say what are we to do? I have thought over the matter very anxiously, and the answer I think clearly is that, in London and the suburbs at all events, the Law Society must provide these gowns and send them out to solicitors done up in bundles, just as useful garments are sent out by maternity charities in equally deserving cases. They might be hung up according to sizes in a room specially set apart in the new building now rising proudly in Chancery Lane, and a solicitor suddenly engaged to conduct a County Court action could in case of urgency telegraph to "Gowneries," Chancery Lane—which would, of course, be the telegraphic address—in some such form as the following: "Send gown Hackney County Court addressed Turner Spotted Dog Mare Street must be twenty-two inches round neck and fifty-five waist messenger will find me waiting in Bar."

Whether such an arrangement would be self-supporting, time alone can show. Personally, I think it would, and if it were to work well the Society might enlarge its business. It might, for instance, supply gowns on the hire-purchase system to solicitors fortunate enough to need them often, and who have a fancy for sticking to the same gown. It

might sell them at a moderate price on cash terms to customers, and they could come and be measured by the secretary, who would call out the sometimes depressing result with the tape in his mouth to the assistant-secretary. And when once firmly established who shall say where this enterprise shall stop? Carried away by enthusiasm I see before me in a future that may not perhaps come in my time, country solicitors sending up indifferent butter and eggs and unsound horses and planting them on their brethren in London through the medium of the Law Society. I see London solicitors, through the same medium, putting country solicitors on to those good things in finance which are only good to the person who puts the other person on to them. I see Whiteley getting jealous, Barker uneasy, and Harrods depressed. I see the dawn of a new era of professional prosperity. I see stretched out an unlimited field for the pursuit of the most questionable practices. Viewed in the prophetic light which fills me at the present moment, I assert that what we may now regard justly as an act of oppression, so cruel and senseless that it might very easily have deluged our land in County Court blood, will prove to have been a blessing in the disguise of a most ridiculous, asinine, and humiliating garment.

A PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

[When turning over some old papers lately, I lighted upon a manuscript copy, yellow with age, of an address evidently prepared for delivery at a provincial meeting of the Incorporated Law Society by the President of the Society at that time. I do not know which President it may have been, or what provincial meeting was in view, or when the address was prepared, or where it was to be delivered, or how the original manuscript of it came into my possession, or whether it was delivered in that form or at all. My memory is, in fact, a total blank on all those points. I only know that I found it, and that I was greatly struck by its pathos and eloquence on looking through it, and that I decided to take upon myself to publish it ; and I hereby apologise to the author, his executors, administrators, and assigns if he or they think that in doing so I have taken a liberty.]

THE ADDRESS

IT is customary on these occasions for your President to take the opportunity of glancing briefly over the legal history of the past year, and of offering such general reflections as occur to him upon matters of interest to our profession.

I propose to follow that custom on the present occasion, but to introduce one innovation by condensing my remarks within the modest limit of eight minutes.

Twelve months ago our provincial meeting was held in an ancient cathedral city. We were entertained with lavish hospitality. We were taken to see churches. We were pampered guests at a ball, a banquet, and a conversazione. We were afforded the opportunity of fishing for bream with highly-educated worms and refined gentles. Wherever we went we were recognised as members of a great though unscrupulous and rapacious profession. It may be that even then a cloud had gathered over the professional horizon, but if so it was no bigger than a statutory mortgage, and we saw it not. Not one of us would, in his wildest dreams, or soberest moments, have anticipated that we should meet to-day on a piece of waste ground usually consecrated to defunct cats, and that some of the most respected members of the Council would now be traversing the streets of this city rattling money-boxes and appealing for charitable assistance on behalf of our wives and families ; while I, your President, stand here with no more imposing rostrum than a plank carpeted with County Court summonses, in which my name appears as defendant, and supported by two beer casks, and no other reading desk than the top of our secretary's once glossy and respectable but now sadly dilapidated hat.

Gentlemen, our profession lies low in the dust. Despoiled of all our privileges, stripped of nearly all our work, brought down from the higher scale of costs to the lower scale, from the lower scale to the lowest scale, from the lowest scale to our bare disbursements, and these

allowed only after taxation and production of a written Agreement under Seal, specifically covering each item, and bearing a 10s. stamp payable by us. And all this in one short year. Well may we rub our bloodshot eyes with our emaciated hands, and ask ourselves whether it is indeed true, or a grizzly vision attributable to filling it up too often and not putting in enough water. Unhappily it is only too true. The twin monsters of officialism and socialism are, as you all know, at the bottom of our ruin. The Board of Trade has wiped the floor with us, and that and other public departments reign in our stead. Our company winding up work is now attached to the Receiver of Wrecks. Divorce proceedings are now prosecuted and defended on inclusive terms by the Master of the Buckhounds, who, with a numerous staff, has been set free from other duties. Landed property passes from owner to owner by means of tickets obtained at all the principal booking offices and libraries, where country seats can be secured one month in advance. Marriage settlements and wills have been abolished by a resolution incidentally passed by the London County Council without notice at a licensing meeting. No contracts are made, because no one is required to perform one when he has made it. Hardly anything is left for our profession to do, and nothing is paid to us when we do it.

It is, I hope, superfluous for me to say that during this stirring time the Council have held several meetings, and that committees have been appointed to consider carefully the very interesting subjects which I have now passed briefly in review. We have made strong representations to the Lord Chancellor and other eminent persons as to

the hardships of our position, and, though unable to stem the tide of socialistic legislation, we have been able to secure some amelioration of our sad condition. It may interest you if I enumerate the principal concessions thus secured for our benefit.

In allotting to vacant alms-houses (all of which, as I may remind you, have been appropriated by the State), preference is now given to solicitors, more especially if they are also members of the Council of the Law Society, and have not earned £5 in the last twelve months.

Solicitors are to be allowed to hold meetings in Trafalgar Square on any day in the week, provided they do not shed blood.

The Incorporated Law Society's Examination Hall, being no longer required for its original purpose, has been licensed for music and dancing. A managing director has been appointed, and it is hoped that, under his guidance, the entertainments will be remunerative, and enable the Society to relieve the more urgent cases of distress among us. Four distinguished members of the council have been engaged to dance a *pas de quatre*, and it is hoped that arrangements will soon be concluded for a *pas de six* and eight. It was hoped that another popular member of our profession would give ventriloquial entertainments, but he has assured the Council that in the present calamitous state of the profession, his full heart will not allow him to evolve amusement out of his empty stomach.

The Law Society's Hall will during the winter months be open as a soup kitchen, at which the wives of solicitors will be able to purchase excellent soup at a penny a quart. Warm drafts of title deeds have been found to be very com-

forting when conveyed carefully and allowed to settle ; and the council have urgently appealed for gifts of conveyances, leases, and mortgages, as they are no longer of value for any other purpose, and may just as well be boiled. In the way of clothing, cast-off suits, and especially administration suits, have also proved useful in the most necessitous cases, and have been distributed with discrimination by the Council principally among themselves.

Gentlemen, these are the principal fruits of our labours for the profession. We do not pretend that we have accomplished all we could desire, but we have at least done our best. In a few weeks or months most of us will have assumed the distinctive garments of our respective parish unions, and be looking out anxiously for gifts from our relatives and friends, and an occasional Sunday visit from some barrister, whose fee-lists we have left unpaid in our palmy days, or some client who cherishes gratitude for futile services rendered to him, or some clerk who has made a competence by means of a modest salary augmented by occasional recourse to the office petty cash. But let us remember even in that last stage of degradation that we were originally gentlemen by Act of Parliament, that parish relief is inseparably associated with the constitutions of our country, and that by a quarrelsome and argumentative demeanour, a steady persistence in getting some unfair advantage—even if it be only a corner seat near the fire—over other paupers, and a habit of encouraging discord and promoting strife among those around us, we may carry even into the workhouse those professional characteristics which made us in happier times the respected bane and universally esteemed terror of the community.

WINGED JUSTICE

THE law's delay is an old familiar topic, and, like the sea-serpent and the colossal gooseberry born out of due season, it never has been and probably never will be exhausted. The law's uncertainty is also an old friend, but that feature of justice, as administered in this country, is not to my present purpose. I am, so to speak, only doing time now.

Much labour has been spent by chancellors, judges, and other excellent persons, whose intentions have been strictly honourable, in efforts to devise means of shortening legal proceedings for the benefit of the British public, and therefore, though the British public will never believe this to the dying day of its last surviving member, for the benefit of legal practitioners. Many changes have been made, good, bad, and indifferent, with that laudable object in view; and, in particular, I believe there is a court called the Commercial Court, which has come into existence nobody exactly knows how, and makes rules for itself nobody exactly knows by what authority, and gallops along nobody knows exactly where or minds much as long as it always does gallop, and never walks, or trots, or ambles quietly.

The subject is one to which I have myself given deep attention, and it occurred to me some time ago that a close examination of the administration of justice in foreign

countries might shed illumination on this vexed problem, and enable me to offer suggestions worthy of consideration by those in high places. I accordingly sold my practice (an action is now pending as to the representations which I made with regard to its value), and made an extended tour throughout the world, in the course of which I studied the legal procedure of every country that I visited. In one country I studied it hard for six months, or I might even say conversely for six months hard, as in my zeal I abstracted portable property from another gentleman when we were staying at the same hotel, in order that I might see for myself how long it took to bring a prisoner to trial, and whether short or long sentences were in favour with the judges in these parts.

On my return to England, home, and beauty, I collated, and analysed, and sifted, and condensed, and greatly improved upon all the facts I had collected, and from them I evolved one simple harmonious whole, containing all the good points of rapidity in every system of civilised justice in the world, and one or two gathered from enterprising races of savages, while at the same time suitable to the exact needs of my own country. Some estimate will be given of the colossal nature of my labours, when I say that I have brought into the compass of one short statute about to be passed the pith and marrow of 379 closely-written note-books, compiled in 43 different countries, and covering on a modest estimate 2,000,000 folios of 72 words each. I shall be pleased to have a copy of the contents of all the note-books made for any one who wishes to read them *in extenso* at 4d., or to an intimate personal friend, 3d. per folio. By an intimate personal friend I mean any one whom I

know really well—for instance, any one from whom I have borrowed money and not felt any obligation to pay it back, because of our friendship.

To the world at large I now give the result of these stupendous labours, and it is my earnest hope that they will bear fruit. I shall not object to their bearing a little fruit for myself in the shape of a testimonial—I mean a real testimonial in the form of hard coin. No silver plate will do for me, and expenditure of part of the money on a portrait is absolutely barred. But while giving that hint—if indeed so delicate and thoughtful an intimation can be called a hint—I claim nothing as of right; and moreover, so generous and open is my nature, that if any gentlemen like to come and see my note-books without bespeaking a copy, they are very welcome to do so; and I leave it entirely to them to put what they like into the plate, which (with half-a-crown in it for a decoy-duck) will be found on the table of the room where hats and coats will be taken care of during the performance.

I trust that I shall not be thought wanting in that modesty which is my greatest, but by no means my only charm, if I express a hope that, out of respect for the author's labours, the following Act, when passed next session, will be generally cited as Turner's Greased Lightning Act.

THE ACT ITSELF

1. There shall be a Court for the rapid and record-breaking administration of justice, adapted to modern ideas and calculated to make litigation attractive to suitors. The said Court shall be called the Greased Lightning Court.

2. When an action is brought which is intended to be tried in the Greased Lightning Court, the writ shall be endorsed with a statement to that effect, and shall also have on it a representation of the Lord Chief Justice for the time being, attired in a full-bottomed wig and running costume, as emblematic of swift justice, but nothing else need appear thereon.

3. There shall be no pleadings, discovery, interrogatories, or other interlocutory proceedings or preliminary canters in the Greased Lightning Court, and the parties resorting to that Court shall be prepared, the moment after the writ is issued, to button their coats and go smack to trial.

4. In the said Court everything shall be either admitted, or assumed, or implied, or inferred, or totally disregarded, or forgotten, for the purpose of arriving at an immediate decision, and of dazzling the public.

5. There shall be no appeal from the Greased Lightning Court in any case, unless it is shown that none of the material facts were before the Court, and then only when the amount involved exceeds £25,000.

6. If, when an action tried in the said Court is called on, the plaintiff's counsel is picking up clerk's fees and something for himself elsewhere, the defendant's counsel shall forthwith begin and conduct the plaintiff's case as well as his own. If neither counsel is present, the usher shall briefly tell the judge what the action is about, and judgment shall thereupon be given. Provided that, if the usher is at the time round the corner supporting nature with the aid of the bar, anybody else in Court, except the solicitors in the case, may explain the facts shortly to the judge.

7. Either party may require an action in the said Court

to be tried before a jury, but the jury shall be discharged unless they agree on a verdict within five minutes after the conclusion of the summing-up, however bewildering or inconsistent the summing-up may be. In the event of their being so discharged, another jury shall be instantly empanelled, who shall hear the same summing-up as nearly as the judge can remember it, but nothing else, and if they also fail to agree on a verdict in five minutes, the defendant's number shall be put up as the winner.

8. No expert witnesses shall be allowed in the Greased Lightning Court, but the counsel for either party shall be allowed to state shortly what would have been said by any expert witnesses called on behalf of his client, and what fee would have been paid for the evidence, and the evidence shall thereupon be deemed to have been given and to have been untrue.

9. The proceedings at the trial shall, as far as possible, be of a colloquial, free-and-easy, go-as-you-please description, and to that intent the following rules shall be observed by the Judge, counsel, solicitors, and parties respectively :—

(a) The judge shall assume that he knows all the facts before any of them have been stated, and shall commence to make such passing comments as may occur to him on that assumption. Should he gradually realise that his thought-reading entertainment has not been a success, he shall pretend not to know it, and use his best endeavours to climb down without appearing to do so, and counsel shall obsequiously render him all the assistance in their power during such process. Any

irritation resulting therefrom shall as far as possible be expended on the solicitors.

- (b) No counsel shall be allowed to make a set speech, or to address the Court for more than three minutes without interruption, or attempt to arrange his ideas, or to think out or to digest any point, or pay regard to any rule of evidence, or cite any authority, or care a blow about the result.
- (c) The solicitors in the case shall advance all counsels' fees and other disbursements, be abused for everything, be paid next to nothing, ruin their hats, lose their umbrellas, tip the ushers, be pushed and shoved about like a football inside a Rugby scrum, and, finally, if on the losing side, leave the Court followed by a trail of discontented clients and reproachful uncalled witnesses, from whom they shall be permitted to escape ultimately by a strategic movement to a retiring-room set apart for the purpose and locked from inside, in which they shall be allowed to remain till danger is over. A fee of two shillings shall be payable for the use of such room.
- (d) The parties shall be spared nearly all the cost and delay attendant upon ordinary litigation, and in lieu thereof shall have a scramble for hot, short, sharp, decisive, inexpensive, breathless, catch 'em - alive justice.

10. Where an appeal lies from the Greased Lightning Court as hereinbefore provided, the same shall be heard immediately, and the following procedure shall be observed. The judge by whom the action has been tried

shall telephone to the Master of the Rolls, and having ascertained that he is there, shall, so far as the imperfect and peculiarly maddening working of the instrument shall permit, tell him shortly the facts of the case, if time has allowed any of them to come out. The Master of the Rolls shall thereupon mention the matter to any colleagues who may be sitting with him at the time, and then telephone back their decision, which shall be announced to the parties by the judge, and the necessary repairs shall be done while the parties wait. If the telephone is out of order the appeal shall be deemed to have been dismissed with costs without calling on either side.

11. No solicitor shall be allowed to advertise himself indirectly under cover of referring to the rapidity of procedure in the Greased Lightning Court, but this shall not prevent any solicitor from writing to the newspapers from his business address, to the effect that an action conducted in his office was brought to trial in that Court in so many days, and that his client was successful.

12. Any person who conscientiously objects to the jurisdiction of the Greased Lightning Court, and of any and every other Court by law established, and to being subject to any control or government whatsoever, shall, on producing a doctor's certificate to the effect that he feels down-trodden, be permitted to settle in Ireland, where he will be as happy as the day is long.

FUSION

FROM time to time suggestions of fusing into one the two branches of the legal profession are, like the voice of the turtle, heard in the land. Young barristers with no influence to back them pine to get into direct contact with the actual client and to be no longer fended off from him by the interposition of a solicitor's body. Solicitors impressed with the belief that the divine afflatus of the genius of the orator is within them, yearn to be allowed to address the Court on their own hook, and to have a cut in for some of those colossal fees paid to successful barristers for very intermittent gusts and whirlwinds of personal attention to any particular case. The public, in whose name so many things are said, and over whose prostrate, and, as a rule, passive body so many shrieking arguments are held, are understood to have a sort of suspicion that for them to employ a solicitor, and the solicitor in turn to resort to a barrister, faintly approaches somehow to paying twice over for the same article—law—and that it comes to be expensive. The barometer of the subject rises and falls, but seldom indicates very stormy weather. The question has never, for instance, convulsed the profession itself in the same way as that of providing tea and muffins for the members of the Law Society within their own building, instead of leaving them to the mercies of the outside purveyor of buns and metropolitan milk. But still there it is, and it

smoulders, and it is always well to put out anything that smoulders lest it should become a fiery flame when least expected. Wherefore I have dipped into this subject in a calm judicial spirit, such as characterises all my views on law reform, and I have arrived at the conclusion that fusion is not only possible but practicable, and not only desirable but absolutely essential. I see in it a remedy for all professional evils, an opening in life for the young barrister, a golden harvest for the really eloquent solicitor, the dawn, nay, the full noon tide of a blessed period of cheap litigation for the British public. I see high jinks in all directions resulting immediately from this one reform. Shall it then be delayed? Certainly not. Is any one better fitted than I am to devise a scheme and carry it through Parliament in triumph? Again, certainly not. Have I already devised such a scheme and put it into the form of a short, simple Act, containing only six sections? Yes, I have. Where is it? Here it is. Will it be passed next session? Why, certainly. Dear reader, you have but to peruse what follows, and then if you do not subscribe to my statue (to which I have anonymously given ten pounds myself) as well as my statute, well, I shall indeed be surprised and pained.

THIS IS MY ACT AND DEED

WHEREAS various parties desire to see the two Branches of the legal profession fused into one congealed heap.

AND WHEREAS most of them do not know what on earth they are talking about, but that circumstance is quite immaterial to the passing of this and some other Acts of Parliament.

AND WHEREAS at a Provincial Meeting of the Incorporated Law Society held some years ago, a resolution on the same subject was proposed and lost, but nobody seems very clear as to what it was, or who lost it, or whether anybody was present at all on the occasion.

AND WHEREAS in these distressing circumstances it is desirable to pass some kind of Act in order to make the world perfect, and everything in the legal line of business quite comfortable and friendly all round.

Be it therefore enacted as follows :—

1. In this Act the word "fusee" shall mean a person fused under the Act, and shall not include the article or thing used for igniting tobacco unless the context imperatively requires it.

2. From and after the 1st of January next Barristers and Solicitors shall be fused.

3. The fusion hereby provided for shall extend to render it lawful, but not expedient or exactly nice, for a Solicitor to retain for his own benefit money remitted to him by a client at his request for the special purpose of paying fees due to Counsel before the passing of this Act.

4. Any Barrister or Solicitor who shall object to be fused shall state the grounds of his objections in writing on or before the 31st December next. The document shall be on cream wove foolscap paper, and written on one side only with a margin of one inch, and impressed with a £25 stamp, and shall be headed with the words, "In the Matter of A. B., a proposed Fusee." Every such document shall be entered in a list, and be open for inspection as a curiosity at some convenient museum at all reasonable times on payment of one shilling.

5. Upon the fusion provided for by this Act taking place the following consequences shall follow:—

All persons who on the 31st December next shall be Barristers or Solicitors shall on and after the 1st January next be called Barristicitors, and shall, when professionally engaged, wear in front of some convenient part of their manly bosoms a circular badge, of not less than six nor more than twelve inches in diameter, with the word "Barristicitor" painted on it, in two coats of good oil paint, in legible white characters on a black ground. Provided that—

Barristers who shall on the 31st December next be his Majesty's Counsel, more or less learned in the law, shall wear the said badge behind instead of in front.

Save for the badge aforesaid, Barristicitors when addressing the Court shall wear whatever garments they please (even in a County Court), but no smoking shall be permitted in any of the Superior Courts till after 2 P.M., except on Saturdays, when the hour shall be 11 A.M., because on that day the Court rises soon after that hour, and is sometimes said not to sit at all.

6. As a general principle partnership association shall be recognised as the best mode of giving effect to this Act, and in the division of partnership work, and remuneration, any Barristicitor who shall previously have been a Solicitor, shall be considered entitled to do as little of the work and get as much of the remuneration as possible, to the intent that the passing of this Act may be to Solicitors the dawn of a blessed dispensation of professional beer and skittles, such as they have never hitherto so much as pictured in their wildest dreams.

LAND TRANSFER

[NOTE.—This paper was written some years before the passing of the Land Transfer Act, and read to a learned audience, mainly composed of lawyers, which accounts for the method of composition. I think I may fairly claim credit (not pecuniary, for that is, I confess, denied to me down my street, but of a higher kind) for the extent to which legislation has been modelled on my suggestions, though I should, I hope, be the first to admit that some improvements have been made in the process of giving effect to them.]

WHEN I was first asked to write a paper, and to read the same on the present interesting occasion, I naturally turned over in my mind the question what would be the most attractive subject that I could introduce to your notice. It must, I thought, be one of burning interest. It must present features of light and shade, so that it may be neither dull nor frivolous. It must above all things not be hackneyed, but, on the contrary, must break out in an entirely fresh place. It must, in short, be calculated to make my audience bubble over with pleasure and intellectual excitement. Deep reflection led me to the conclusion that there was one subject which fulfilled all these requirements, and so far as I knew had never before been presented in any shape or form to any meeting of lawyers. I refer to the Transfer of Land. I claim no credit for this original thought, my only wonder being that no one has ever taken up the subject before.

In approaching this matter, I desire in the first place to

brush aside all technicalities. Whether the landowner is possessed of an estate in fee simple, or in tail, or for life; whether his unbridled desires lie in the direction of building houses, cutting timber, or obtaining minerals from the bowels of the earth—these are points to which I attach no importance, and which I disdain to discuss. I keep my eye on one central point—a Land Registry. I fix my attention on one all-important person—a Registrar. Without these any scheme for simplifying the Transfer of Land must, in my opinion, be regarded as an aimless absurdity.

I would have, then, a Land Registry in a convenient situation in the West-End of London, within easy reach of the principal clubs. If a site in Piccadilly could be secured, preferably overlooking the Green Park, it would do admirably. The building should be so designed as to sever completely the official from the private departments; and this, I think, could best be done by arranging for all official business to be transacted in the basement, and having the area gate left open during office hours so that any one who wanted to register a transfer of land could easily go down there and do it. I would make no compulsory charge for this accommodation, but would have a money-box at the door with a reference to the Statute “*De Donis*” on it in case any one felt grateful. Nobody has hitherto felt very grateful for any measure of law reform so far as my observation goes.

The main entrance would, of course, lead into the private department; and here I would have a spacious central hall, from which would radiate a series of noble apartments appropriated to the Registrar. There would be a dining-room, a drawing-room, a billiard-room, a smoking-room, a

day-nursery, and ample bedroom accommodation for the Registrar, his wife, and family. The whole would be elegantly furnished, and pictures of eminent judges (I believe they are to be found) would adorn the walls.

From the ground floor a colossal staircase would take us to suites of rooms set apart for the assistant-registrars, of whom there would be six. Each of these gentlemen would have his sitting-room, bedroom, and bathroom ; and there would be in addition a common-room, card-room, and gymnasium.

Ascending again to the second floor we should come to less luxurious but thoroughly comfortable accommodation for the staff, with ingenious speaking-tube communications connected with the basement, and a hydraulic lift down to the same, so that if any one should by design or accident drop in there, the boy in charge might whistle up and secure the immediate attendance of any official not otherwise occupied.

On the third floor there would be a kitchen and all its accessories in charge of a carefully-selected chef and competent staff of assistants.

From the building I pass to the still more important question of the selection of the Registrar and his six assistants.

The first would be a very difficult post to fill. He must have passed the Solicitor's Preliminary Examination, and thus be a man of advanced culture and refinement. He must have a good presence and engaging manners. He must have no obstinate prejudices on the subject of Land Transfer, but must regard all classes of estates in land in an equal and sublimely indifferent spirit. He must be

trusted not to create equitable mortgages on deeds left with him, unless really pressed to meet a heavy bill. He must have a ready wit in the way of making portentous official returns out of the slenderest materials in the most unintelligible form. He must play a good rubber, be hospitably disposed, and not too curious as to the acts and deeds of his assistants. Such a man should be of about my own standing (and I may incidentally mention that I possess all the other virtues described), and his salary not less than £5000 a year.

The selection of the Registrar's assistants would also be a matter of great importance. There should, I think, be a prescribed limit of age, and I would suggest that it should be fixed between the ages of twenty-one and seventy-five, so as to exclude on the one hand men of insufficient experience, and on the other hand those who are past the prime of life. Their fighting weight should not, I think, be under eleven stone. Their capacity should be tested by examination before their names can be put up, and the following appear to me to be, merely by way of illustration, appropriate tests and subjects :—

(1) A paper designed to elicit the candidate's knowledge of the great Law Reforms of the past century in their bearing upon the Principles and Practice of Golf.

(2) A short Essay on Urbanity ; illustrated by examples of the demeanour of eminent leaders at the Bar to junior counsel and solicitors at consultations and in Court.

I have reflected over the question whether to these subjects should be added a paper having reference to the registration of title to land, but, on the whole, I think not. The subject is a difficult one, and I should not wish to

damp the spirits of the competitors by compelling them to study a process with which, after all, the Registrar's assistants will have so little need to practically concern themselves.

These are the outlines of the Scheme which I venture to submit to the profession. Without going so far as to say that it exhausts the whole subject of the transfer of land, I do maintain that it goes to the very root of it, and that if a Land Registry is started on this basis, the appointments of Registrar and Assistant Registrars will become most popular. It has cost me many sleepless nights and many hours of laborious and gratuitous work to evolve it in its present complete form, but I am proud of the profession to which I belong. I am most willing to give a little of my time and very exceptional intellectual powers to the service of Law Reform; and I shall be more than repaid for all I have done if I live to see a stately building of the kind I have described rise up in Piccadilly facing the Green Park.

But do not imagine that I stop at that point. The building comes pre-eminently first, and next to it those selected to fill a noble destiny within it, worked out as I trust for the nation's benefit between the hours of eleven and four. But even a Land Registry and its staff must at times have something to do, lest their intellects should become blunted, their energies paralysed, and time hang too heavily upon them. Therefore I have addressed myself also to the entirely new and original subject of Land Transfer, and I venture to think that the following short and simple Act will comprehend everything needful and settle the whole matter without further discussion.

THE ACT

1. In this Act the following expressions, whether used or not, shall have the following meanings :—

“The Court” shall include every ill-lighted and badly-ventilated place devoid of acoustic properties in which justice is administered.

“Private Practice” shall not include the Attorney and Solicitor General, whatever may be their personal views.

2. This Act shall, unless the contrary is anywhere expressly declared, be read in connection with and as supplemental too, and whenever necessary or convenient, shall be deemed to flatly contradict any other Act now in force of any description on any subject unless any one objects, provided that any such objection shall be stated in writing, in firm but courteous language, and filed at the office of the Receiver of Wrecks within three years from the date in which the objection shall be conceived ; and such date, though not mentioned again in this Act, is hereinafter called “The Date of Objection.” No further or other proceeding shall be necessary, and no notice shall be taken of the objection.

3. The operation of this Act shall be limited for a period of ten years to the private residences of the Lord Chancellor, the Judges and Law Officers of the Crown, and the members of the Council of the Incorporated Law Society, with the rights, easements, and appurtenances thereto belonging.

4. The property included in the operation of Clause 3 of this Act shall be hereinafter called the “Area,” but that expression shall not be deemed to limit this Act to the

portion of a hereditament dedicated by prescription to the clandestine reception of soldiers and constables in uniform by domestic servants.

5. In order to register the title to property within the Area no Area steps shall be necessary, but the title to such property shall be deemed to be registered as from the date of the passing of this Act.

6. Any person who has registered his title shall receive a ticket, on production of which he shall thereafter be entitled to admission without payment to the following places of interest—St. Paul's Cathedral, The British Museum, The Tower of London, and Westminster Abbey.

7. Whenever any owner of property within the Area, whose title shall have been registered, mortgages or leases or otherwise deals with the same, he shall not be at liberty to do so. Provided, nevertheless, that he shall be at liberty to do so on obtaining the fiat of the Attorney General, who shall on every such occasion receive a fee of fifty guineas, which he shall be at liberty to retain in addition to his other diminished emoluments.

8. Any person who wishes to have a certificate in respect of any matter or thing done or omitted under this Act shall be entitled to bespeak the same at the office of the Masters in Lunacy, but no such certificate shall have any force or effect except so far as it may have any such force or effect by virtue of anything therein expressed or implied, or left out or put in afterwards.

9. No Solicitor shall be required or allowed to discharge any professional or other duties in connection with the registration of title or the transfer of land, and subject to the provisions hereinafter contained, this Act shall operate

as an Act of Bankruptcy on the part of all practising Solicitors.

10. A building shall, with all reasonable expedition, be erected somewhere, and shall when erected be styled "The Refuge for Solicitors ruined by the Land Transfer Act," which title shall be printed in conspicuous letters over the main entrance.

11. Any Solicitor shall be entitled to take up his abode in the said Refuge on production of his practising certificate, and on his making a statutory declaration that, in consequence of the Land Transfer Act, he is no longer able to support himself and his family, or has no longer any wish to do so. He shall, if married, have the option of also claiming admission for his wife, and shall fill up a form as follows:—

Wife's full name.	Wife's actual or alleged age.	Any remarks about her personal appearance and habits.	Whether applicant would rather have wife admitted, or prefers freedom, in which latter case insert in this column the words, "Not me."

12. Solicitors admitted to the said Refuge shall have free lodging and board, and two complete Chancery suits of clothing per annum. They shall be allowed to be visited by friends on appointed days, and to receive presents of tea and snuff. No Solicitor residing in the said Refuge shall be entitled to practise law, but he may practise anything else he likes—except the cornet.

13. Every solicitor who shall expire by effluxion of time

or otherwise in the said Refuge shall be economically buried at the expense of the State in some convenient spot within four days after his demise, and the operation of this Act shall be suspended during the funeral as a token of respect. The Dead March in Saul shall be played by a brass band in the funeral procession if the deceased Solicitor shall, within two days after his departure, bespeak it in writing, but not otherwise.

THE LONG VACATION

A Rejected Address prepared for a Provincial Meeting of the
Incorporated Law Society.

THE Long Vacation is an institution of great antiquity, as indeed the very title implies, for it is derived from the two purely Saxon words, "long" and "vacation." Its origin has been attributed to various sources, but the true root of it is undoubtedly to be traced to William Rufus. It is recorded of that hirsute monarch in that monumental, but, I fear, now little-read work, "Snooke's Digest" (vol. xliii. p. 27), that while hunting one day in Battersea Park his horse shied at a strange looking object which, on examination, turned out to be a typical female of the time in rational costume on a bicycle.

The king was nearly thrown from his horse, and on recovering his composure he swore a good round oath—measuring in circumference about 24 inches.

"By the blood of my ancestor, Henry the Eighth," quoth he to the Lord Chancellor Eldon, "we will have no such mummery as this. Tell the judges to come to Queen's Bench, Court No. 7, to-morrow morning, and bring this beldame too, and we will soon see whether our favourite sport is to be interfered with by these female monstrosities on bicycles. And now, my lords, let us again to the chase,

and see if we cannot shoot a few more foxes with our trusty cross-bows."

On the following day, which happened to be the 10th of August, the judges assembled in their Sunday clothes and full-bottomed wigs, and the king, who was graciously pleased to come in person, told them to find the woman guilty of high treason and to leave the sentence to him. They respectfully asked to be permitted first to hear whether she had aught to say in her defence.

"Hear her," roared the irritable sovereign. "We can stand a good deal, but, by the bones of the departed Saint Charles I., before we listen to the drivel of yon unsexed buffoon, we will see you all ducked from the Thames embankment hard by the obelisk."

"Sire," interrupted the accused female, as in deference to the presence of royalty she flicked the dust off her bloomers, which, owing to her having been in close custody, she had had no opportunity of changing for more suitable attire, "this is not justice; this is blatant, brutal, beastly tyranny. I am not unsexed. I am merely a New Woman coming out in monthly parts."

"Parts or no parts," retorted William II., "and by heaven it is difficult to tell what parts you have in that flip-flappery, we will not hear you. Judges, do as we tell you and keep not our sacred person waiting, as there are confounded draughts in these New Courts of Justice, and our royal nose begins to sniffle already like a leaking cask of our favourite Malmsey."

The judges hesitated, looked at each other, sent for the Annual Practice, and looked up Order XIV., Rule 1, while the king, in growing impatience, gnawed his mous-

tache and puffed at his cigarette. Then the Lord Chief Justice, collecting himself from different parts of the Court, pointed out with deep submission, but at the same time with dauntless courage, that it was contrary to the traditions of the Bench to desecrate justice at the whim of a red-haired, foul-mouthed, cross-eyed apology for a reigning sovereign.

"Sooner than do this, sire," he concluded, "we would go hence as one man and be seen no more in these Courts for a whole calendar month, hard as it would be to us to obstruct the sacred fountain of justice and tear ourselves away from this imposing pile of dark passages."

"A month, dost thou say, thou miserable spokesman of a row of word-twisting, straw-splitting old women. By the sanguinary Wars of the Roses you shall not set foot here again, any one of you, until our birthday, which falls on the 2nd of November, and so shall it be from the 10th August to the 2nd November as long as this fair realm shall last."

While this terrible tragedy was being enacted, the culprit gradually made her way towards the monarch, whose naturally brutal features relaxed as he gradually realised that she was a decidedly good-looking woman. Giving his hand with true royal grace he led her out of Court and insisted on personally whistling for a hansom on her account.

So much for the historical aspect of the question, which I find is little known. Let us now consider whether an institution so striking in its inception, so hallowed by time, so mellowed by strict observance, should be uprooted.

This view of my subject naturally divides itself into four parts. (1) Do the Bench desire any alteration? (2) Do the Bar? (3) Do the Solicitors? (4) Do the Public?

(1) The Bench. I think I might go so far as to say that they on the whole would prefer not to disturb it. No doubt, there have been whispers that some of the judges would rather sit all the year round, and the name of one judge has been mentioned as an instance of a judge, who, like the psalmist, rises early and never cares for the rest—except when playing billiards. Still, as a whole, the judges are resigned to the long vacation from a high sense of duty.

(2) The Bar. I regret to say that I am unable to give any information as to their sentiments, but the truth is that I have been all round the Temple and Lincoln's Inn without finding anybody at chambers, except one junior, and he was oiling his bat, and had a lady to tea, whom he introduced to me as his first cousin. Had our provincial meeting been held a month later I should doubtless have been able to supply this blank.

(3) Solicitors. They, poor crushed worms, have been passing a good many resolutions of late years, and most of them seem to want to abolish the long vacation altogether. They don't see why the judges should go off to the play-grounds of Europe and nearly all the barristers follow suit, while the solicitor has to keep his office going and snatch his hasty fortnight at Southend, or, it may be, on the sands of Margate, when he can, because clients will marry, and die, and assault, and buy, and sell, and let, and start gold companies, and wreck them, and make agreements, and break them, and otherwise play the game of life, although

the Courts are not sitting. They don't like being in the dark alone. They want the other foxes to have their tails cut off. They prefer the idea of having companions in misery. Theirs is rather the bitter cry of the snubbed, sat-upon, ridiculed, submerged attorney than the strident yell of the whole-souled, indigestible reformer, whom some quiet souls would not object to see eaten up with zeal.

(4) The Public. They, of course, do not matter, and I will not waste the valuable time of this Provincial meeting by saying what their wishes may be. I don't think they really know what they do want, and I am sure I don't.

A few words in conclusion as to the true remedy. I am personally in favour of abolishing this survival of the dark ages altogether. I would have the judges sit all the year round. I would have justice administered continuously and free to all. I would have no more Bills of Costs rendered to anybody. I would have no fees marked on briefs, and if marked I would have them not paid, and if paid I would have them returned. I would have the Chambers of Counsel and the offices of solicitors available without charge to all female clients of prepossessing appearance.

But these may be Utopian visions, and I know well that such sweeping reforms would encounter all the weapons of vested interest and unscrupulous opposition. Therefore I advocate as a matter of practical politics a less drastic measure of reform, which we may reasonably hope that the influence of our great profession will suffice to carry now, and that is to leave things exactly as they are, except that

the long vacation shall in future commence on the evening of the 11th of August instead of the morning of the 12th, and terminate on the morning of the 24th October instead of the evening of the 23rd. This would at least show that we are in grim earnest, and when that is realised larger schemes cannot be much longer delayed.

Gentlemen, you have highly honoured me at this Provincial Meeting by listening to my observations, and I thank you from my heart—all seven¹ of you. It is no light matter to have come, and in several instances brought your wives, to this distant town in the cause of the profession and the public, and to have attended here on this second day after the high time you have most of you had in this seductive city. I know well too that other attractions have been dangled before you which you must have been more than human to resist; that you might at this moment have been going over a biscuit factory, or inspecting in a fog the river which I understand pursues its course somewhere about here; or examining fossils at the local museum. You might be in the street furtively glancing at the bonnie lasses of this place with one eye, while keeping the other fixed with every appearance of matrimonial fidelity on your respective wives. All this and more you might have done. But you are here—goodness only knows why—glued to seven cane-bottomed chairs, while I have been addressing you on this abstruse subject, so familiar, I fear, to all of you, but yet, I trust, made fresh

¹ This was prophetically intended as a covert allusion to the small number likely to be present when the paper was read. It might, of course, have had to be slightly reduced or increased according to the actual number.

on the present occasion by somewhat original treatment. Noble hearts ! Faithful souls ! Consummate bores ! Richly have you earned the cold collation at half-a-crown apiece now awaiting you in the next room, and the Provincial frolics that are to follow it.

THE END



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